

CRAFT AND FOLK ART MUSEUM ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW OF JOHN BROWSE

By Joan M. Benedetti



John Browse at Home
April 1, 2008

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY

John Browse was born August 25, 1927, in Nairobi, Kenya. He came to the Egg and The Eye gallery in November 1971 as the organizer (with his partner, Alan Donovan) of a hugely successful touring exhibition of African decorative arts. Soon thereafter, he became Edith Wyle's Assistant Director in the gallery. When CAFAM was fully operational as a museum, ca. Summer 1975, his title was changed to CAFAM Shop Manager. He resigned in March 1976. He was re-hired as Shop Manager in 1982 and worked at CAFAM until April 30, 1989, when he resigned to devote more time to his import business. Altogether, he worked at the Egg and The Eye/CAFAM for 11 years. Since then, he has attended most of the exhibition openings and has maintained friendships with many of the museum staff that worked at CAFAM before its temporary closing at the end of 1997. Until recently, he ran a very successful import business in Los Angeles.

INTERVIEW HISTORY

Interviewer: Joan M. Benedetti. B.A., Theater; M.A., Library Science, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana. Related Experience: Milwaukee Public Library Decorative Arts Librarian, 1967 – 1968; CAFAM Museum Librarian 1976 – 1997. From 1998 – 2012, Benedetti worked to process the CAFAM Records, 1965 – 1997, which are now part of Special Collections at the UCLA Young Research Library. From 2008 – 2010 she conducted oral history interviews with seventeen former CAFAM staff and trustees; almost 60 hours were recorded and transcribed. She is the author of several articles on folk art terminology and small art museum libraries and the editor of *Art Museum Libraries and Librarianship*, Lanham, MD: ARLIS/NA and Scarecrow Press, 2007.

Time and Setting of Interview

Place: John Browse's home in Los Angeles.

Dates: Session 1: Monday, March 31, 2008; Session 2: Tuesday, April 1, 2008.

Time of day, length of sessions, and total hours recorded: Both interviews took place in the morning. The first session was two hours, nine minutes, and forty-one seconds; the second session (the following day) was one hour, thirty-four minutes, and forty-four seconds. A total of three hours, forty-four minutes, and twenty-five seconds of conversation were recorded.

Persons present during the interview: John Browse and Joan Benedetti.

Conduct and Content of Interview: To prepare for the Browse interviews, Benedetti reviewed the relevant documents in the CAFAM Archives. The interview follows a roughly chronological outline—with some detours. It is not always clear whether some events referred to took place during John's earlier (1971 – 1976) or later (1982 – 1989) tenure.

Editing: Browse was given the opportunity to review the transcript and to supply missing or misspelled names and to verify the accuracy of the contents. Benedetti added full names and opening dates of CAFAM exhibitions where appropriate. She also added further information for clarification and deleted some back-and-forth comments that did not add to the reader's understanding of the narrative. Time stamps have been added to both the table of contents and the transcript at five-minute intervals; the time stamps make it easier to locate the topics in the transcript that are mentioned in the table of contents.

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CRAFT AND FOLK ART MUSEUM ORAL HISTORY PROJECT INTERVIEW OF JOHN BROWSE

Session 1, Monday, March 31, 2008. Interviewed by Joan M. Benedetti (2 hours, 9 minutes, 41 seconds).

Benedetti: Today is Monday, March 31, 2008, and I'm here with John Browse in his apartment in Los Angeles and I'm going to be talking with John about his involvement with the Craft and Folk Art Museum and with its predecessor, The Egg and The Eye Gallery, and some of his personal background. And my name is Joan Benedetti. So, John, let's start with you. Can you tell us when and where you were born?

Browse: I was born in Nairobi, Kenya, [August 25], 1927. My family were pioneers to Kenya. They got married in South Africa, went up by boat to Mombasa on their honeymoon with a one-way ticket, and stayed there.

Benedetti: And where were they coming from when they--?

Browse: From Johannesburg. Father was an optometrist and he had a boxful of spectacles ready-made. His brother-in-law had a pharmacy in Nairobi and said, "You know, people here haven't got any reading glasses. I think you should start a business." So they went with a one-way ticket and a box full of spectacles, reading spectacles--

Benedetti: So they were born in Johannesburg.

Browse: In Johannesburg. Actually, Mother was born in New York City.

Benedetti: Ah!

Browse: Her mother had gone to visit her sister and Mother was actually born in New York.

Benedetti: But her parents were from Johannesburg. . . . And then they moved to Kenya.

Browse: To Kenya. So they were pioneers, I mean really early [white] people there.

Benedetti: And were you—so you were born in Kenya after they had moved there. And so, tell a little bit about your childhood. What kind of—I mean, you say they were pioneers, but were they on a farm or--?

Browse: No, we lived in a city, in the town, [Nairobi, which was] very small. I mean I remember the roads were made of mud and when Mother wanted to go downtown a rickshaw was sent up to the neighborhood and she and Granny used to sit in the back of the rickshaw and I sat on the footstool and the black young man used to trot us back downtown, all the way. I mean, it's really, it's going back to [when I was] about four or five years old [1931-32].

Benedetti: And your father was practicing optometry in the city--

Browse: In the city, yes. And it built up to a very large business. I mean, it was very successful at one time. I never wanted to be an optometrist. It was expected because I was the only son. And I didn't like living in Kenya so, at a very early age of 13, I asked to go to school in South Africa to get away from the family. It meant going on a boat all by myself to a boarding school [in Johannesburg]. It's unheard of in this country, but you know, in England a lot of people put their children to boarding school. And I didn't get on very well with my father, so the idea was to get away from him. And so I did my early, my kind of high school education, in South Africa and then I returned to Nairobi and it was 14 days before the end of the war and conscription—so I was called up!

Benedetti: This was the end of--

Browse: The Second World War The war ended on the 15th of August [1945] and my birthday is on the 25th, so I was eligible. We applied to get out, but they said no, and instead of doing two years I did 18 months in the service, which was a terrible waste of time. And then when I got out, I said, "You know, I suppose we should contact the college in London," and, "Oh, that's a nice surprise," they said. And it was expected; you just did these things. My two interests in life were architecture or medical research. But medical research was out because my father had visited me when I was [in] high school—one year before graduating—and I said I was interested in medical research and he went down to the very advanced medical research institute in Johannesburg and spoke to them and they said to him—and he reported back—"Well, if you don't cure cancer, there's no hope. It's a waste of time." Can you imagine telling this to a young person who just loved chemistry and physics? So I thought, "Well, that's out." I'll do architecture. But I did neither.

Benedetti: Now, so you said "the college in London." Which college was that?

Browse: It's now called the City of London College, but it used to be called the Northampton Polytechnic before it got elevated to college status. **[5:00]** And I was the last of the three-year courses. Then it became a four-year course. Sat through all that, hating every minute and then returned to Kenya. [Laughing]

Benedetti: But you did study architecture there?

Browse: No.

Benedetti: No. You took a general kind of course?

Browse: In fact—no, it's just that when I got to London I'd never been to a gallery. I'd never been to a concert in Africa. I'd never heard music, anything like that, and at the Nuffield Foundation Hall of Residents, I met a Canadian who was teaching there, teaching architecture, and he found I was interested in things and he kind of was like a mentor.

He said, "Go and do this; go and see that; go to these exhibitions." And that was my kind of upbringing in art. It was like having, you know, an absolute teacher. He saw my vulnerability and my enthusiasm and I had to report back: I'd been to this show; I'd been to that concert, or this play.

Benedetti: Now was he on the faculty, did you say? Or he was an older student?

Browse: No, he was actually teaching at the Architectural Institute [Association School of Architecture] in London. He'd been brought over from M.I.T.

Benedetti: Oh—he was an American.

Browse: American—Canadian actually.

Benedetti: Canadian. I'm sorry. You did say that.

Browse: But he was a brilliant architect and he won three competitions in England that were all anonymous, almost consecutive years. So, I had a teacher that was quite an extraordinary person. And the next person that taught me a lot was Edith [Wyle]! I mean, that was the kind of education that was kind of strange that the two loves of art and music came not from colleges or anything, but from people.

Benedetti: Yes—but that was quite a few years--

Browse: --later--

Benedetti: --to come. So [from London] you went back to Kenya—to Nairobi—and--

Browse: --practiced optometry

Benedetti: Ah-h-h.

Browse: For *years*.

Benedetti: Really! How long was it?

Browse: Well, on and off—I left twice—I once went to the States—I walked out on the family business and came to America.

Benedetti: Do you remember approximately when that was?

Browse: It was—I was here the year before Kennedy died—I can't remember--

Benedetti: Oh, well, that was '62—he died in November '63.

Browse: I was here the year before and things didn't work out, so I went back [to Kenya].

Benedetti: What were you—were you going to go into business?

Browse: I was going to go into business with some friends [and] that never came off. It was an import business and it just never worked, and it was to do with African and Indian imports.

Benedetti: So you were interested in that for a while!

Browse: I was interested—oh, for years, yes, I was interested in tribal and ethnic--

Benedetti: Talk about that a little bit, since it was such an important part of your life later on.

When did that—I mean, obviously, you were there [in Africa], but I could understand if you didn't find out very much about it [when you were] there and apparently you did.

Browse: Well, I don't know. It was just something that was ingrained, that, you know, you were interested in cultures, it just seemed to be a natural thing. But then just before I left for the States the second time I met Alan Donovan, who was an American who was in the State Department in Biafra [in] the Nigerian War, and he was so disillusioned by the American government that he literally tore up his passport and vanished from the State Department. (I don't think he really did that but that's what he tells everybody he did.) And he took a bus tour right across to East Africa, ended up in the northern frontier [the Kenya/Somali border], which was inaccessible because there was a tribal war going on. And he spent months there, collecting artifacts, studying the culture of the Turkana, the Rendille, the Sambura tribes. And then he came down to Nairobi, found this gallery in Nairobi called Gallery 68, and had an exhibition there. I was very friendly with the director of the gallery, who said to me, "John, you've got to come and see what I've got." And I was introduced to Alan. It was a time when I was thinking of leaving Kenya for the second time, so I looked at his collection and said, "I'll buy it."

Benedetti: Was this in 1968—was that why it [Gallery 68] was called--

Browse: Uh-huh. So he said, "I've just sold the whole collection. Some American just came in from Texas while I was setting up and bought everything! He wanted the panels. He wanted the pushpins. He wanted everything to go back to the States." So I said to Alan, "Well, I want a collection too." And that was our--the beginning of our relationship. He said he needed some money **[10:00]** and he was going to go back up to the northern frontier. I said, "How much do you need? Here's a check. Go to the bank."

Benedetti: So, you had been saving a bit from your working in--

Browse: --in Kenya--

Benedetti: --in your Dad's office.

Browse: Yes, I had saved. But I always spent it every year. I went to London and blew it all on theater and--

Benedetti: But you had a little bit to spare--

Browse: Oh, yes, you know. And then Alan came and—actually, at that time I also had—I wasn't living in Nairobi. I was living on a farm outside Nairobi. I had bought a small farm. So I was doing optometry and farming at the same time.

Benedetti: Were you—I remember those years—and my husband and I—and a lot of people we knew were very interested in—I don't even know if we called it "sustainable farming" at the time, but it was—we were, you know, [thinking about] getting "back to the land"—and is that what you were doing?

Browse: No, no, it was very difficult. I didn't want to live with the family or anywhere near town and people were leaving the farms. They were unsafe. It was the time of the Mau Mau revolution.

Benedetti: Oh yes, yes.

Browse: And people wanted people to just care take the farms.

Benedetti: I see.

Browse: And I said I would do that and then some friends phoned up and said this particular farm was actually for sale. The old folks were very, very ill. And it was a farm I had seen thousands of times. It was on the top of a hill. It was a dream place. And I borrowed money from an aunt. Father wouldn't loan me money and I bought the farm. So I ran an optometry business at the same time as I farmed and produced eggs, chickens, and yoghurt. I was known as the yoghurt king.

Benedetti: So you had a cow, a--

Browse: 14 cows.

Benedetti: 14 cows? And you--

Browse: And hundreds of chickens!

Benedetti: And you were doing this by yourself?

Browse: Well, you had black servants.

Benedetti: Oh-h-h. And you didn't feel any fear of the [Mau Mau]?

Browse: Oh, no, no, no. Not at all. But it was a kind of—another aspect of one's life that I think is probably one of the most fulfilling that one ever had. Because you are living in nature and you can't stop the milk coming and you can't stop the eggs. You have to plant the crops.

Benedetti: Yes, you have to get up at--

Browse: You have to—you can't stop. And you can't complain. And it just is a wonderful cycle.

Benedetti: Yes.

Browse: And that kind of made up for the misery of testing people's eyes, which was pretty awful.

People come to you—in those days fashion wasn't part of eyewear. And people were very upset to be wearing glasses and—it's so different today. I mean—you're rather proud of wearing an Armani frame, you know. Compared to those days--

Benedetti: Yes—they were in a bad mood to start with when they came in to see you.

Browse: Yes, just to start with, yes.

Benedetti: So you continued to work in the optometry office?

Browse: Yes, all the time.

Benedetti: So you'd get up at four in the morning to milk the cows?

Browse: Yes, I don't know how I did it. I worked seven days a week, from four in the morning til ten at night.

Benedetti: Yeah. Of course you did have some help I guess.

Browse: Oh yes. And then that's when I met Alan and he gave me this—I was leaving again—and he gave me--[he had] built up a collection that I brought to the States. And I joined a group of people in the east coast and after one year they decided they wouldn't open the import business. It was to be called Equatorial Imports, I think--Equatorial Imports, yes. And there was a problem in '70 with property values and they didn't want to spend the money—this was outside of Philadelphia. And they said they're not going to go ahead with the project. And I said, "Well, what happens to me?" And they said, "Well, that's the American way. I'm sorry." And I was literally *out*—I said, "But what about all this stuff that I've put in and the money I've brought in?"

Benedetti: And where were the objects?

Browse: In a storage area.

Benedetti: Oh.

Browse: And so they said, "Well, take whatever you like, what you've brought, and, you know, a little extra for trouble." And so I packed this all up in my little car and left them. Never saw them again.

Benedetti: And where did you go then?

Browse: I then went to New York, where Alan--who I've mentioned before, had arrived in Kenya, done this wonderful exhibition [15:00] [there] in Gallery 68 and agreed to stay [in

business] with the owner, Sherry Hunt, [as co-director of the ethnic (tribal) arts section] and helped develop that aspect of the gallery, not so much modern art and things, but folkloric art, ethnographic arts. And he had an eye to help design, so you got the carvers and the stone masons and the jewelry makers to create designs, and he came to the States with a whole package to find export markets.

Benedetti: Now—maybe we should just say—what was his background—a little bit about his background.

Browse: He was a UCLA Afr—no, he studied political science, African Affairs, and business management.

Benedetti: So he also had not taken any classes in art or ethnography--

Browse: No, no, but he ended up—and he's written this extraordinary book [*My Journey through African Heritage*, Nairobi: Kenway Publications, 2005]—he produced—he put Kenya on the map of craft development and he was given many awards by different companies and even—I think—he was mentioned by the United Nations [for] what he'd done for Kenya. Everything he ever did there he did with love and everything he ever did was stolen from him, every design he did was copyrighted in America, but then copied in Kenya and sold. Anyhow, he decided to come to the States to do a coast-to-coast tour and he contacted me and said, "You know, you could help me." And I said, "Well, you could buy back my collection." And he said, "No I can't do that. I haven't got the money to buy it. But if you use your car and a trailer and help me, we'll sell your stuff. I won't charge you a commission, and we can travel the States." Our first stops were two shows in New York, and then Chicago, the big expo, Black Expo in '71, a huge big thing, and then Denver, two shows, and then The Egg and The Eye!

Benedetti: Let's go back just a little bit [both laughing]. The Black Expo was in New York.

Browse: No, Chicago.

Benedetti: Oh, in Chicago. And was that African art only or what was it?

Browse: No, it was a completely black expo in the cattle yards—what do they call it?—the big--

Benedetti: Oh, the stockyards.

Browse: The stockyards. A gigantic, gigantic exhibition of African development—but not arts—we were the curiosity. It was just showing their development into the world, into America. Very few white people came. It was—we were the—absolutely they thought we were, perhaps, half-caste.

Benedetti: How interesting.

Browse: We were the only two white faces. And we had--we were given a space right next to the stage where all the famous singers sang and produced and performed every day. And we were given this gigantic area to put our exhibition up and do a fashion show.

Benedetti: Was this sort of the start of some of the African American interest in their roots?

Browse: Yes, definitely. And we were kind of the curiosity. What were we doing? Why are white guys doing this?

Benedetti: Yes.

Browse: It was very, very strange. It was very, very weird.

Benedetti: You didn't—they weren't entirely friendly but--

Browse: Yes and no.

Benedetti: Mystified?

Browse: Both of us had very black hair and we both had beards at that time, so we looked kind of as if we almost fitted in.

Benedetti: Yeah, yeah. So did you sell all--

Browse: Oh yes, we were selling. We had to, kind of, to kind of--

Benedetti: But I mean, that particular show, the black show, was that particularly successful?

Browse: Everything we had from the beginning of the show was for sale and we had—I mean every type of artifact that the Africans used, from utensils, weavings, textiles, jewelry, and then all the updated crafts that Alan had redesigned like salad servers, which became so popular with African heads on the ends. And we designed them—he designed everything that was kind of—friendly to the Western eye.

Benedetti: Uh-huh.

Browse: But still tribal in a way.

Benedetti: I wonder. I find myself wondering if you ever had—I mean you must have had people who were really only interested in **[20:00]** the authentic material.

Browse: Oh yes, a lot of the stuff was authentic. We had shields and spears and food bowls—oh massive authentic stuff--mats. People were very interested in those—and they smelled terrible. We had to clean them because they had been used. A kind of a fat smell that--over the years, I'd imported and one had to spend hours and hours scrubbing and deodorizing all these things.

Benedetti: I suppose some people would value that, though, as a sign of authenticity.

Browse: Oh yes, definitely, the use--it wasn't the age—where nowadays you talk about antiques being over 50 years old or even older—[with] ethnographic things, it was the use. As long as it had use—these are things here--

Benedetti: **[Aside: John is pointing out some of the objects in his apartment.]**

Browse: If you have a spoon that you could see was really used in a bowl, and the edges were worn, that was the best part of it. Or when you get to, like, the Ethiopian crosses, which they hang round their necks, holding them and touching them, gradually there was a wear on the actual silver of the cross.

Benedetti: A patina.

Browse: And became—not so much a patina—but actual *wear*.

Benedetti: Wear, yes.

Browse: You could see where they had been handled and fondled and you could see a kind of a wearing down of the silver. People loved that.

Benedetti: And, let's see, so Alan had collected material from many parts of East Africa, not just Nairobi or--

Browse: No, actually, the collection that he brought was a lot from East Africa, but he also had textiles from about ten other countries: jewelry from West Africa, from Ethiopia, from Morocco. It was a Pan-African exhibit.

Benedetti: Well, I would imagine there was a lot of interest in it, even though they weren't quite sure who you guys were.

Browse: In the article that was in the *L.A. Times* it said the fashion show ended up: "last month the tour ended with a triumphal note in Beverly Hills, California. The final exhibition was the most successful function ever held at the exclusive folk art restaurant/gallery, The Egg and The Eye." And it was.

Benedetti: So, now let me just get this straight—you started out—you had a show in New York--

Browse: Two in New York.

Benedetti: Two in New York. Did you go back to Philadelphia?

Browse: No, then we went to Chicago.

Benedetti: Chicago.

Browse: And then we had two in Denver.

Benedetti: And who—were both of you—I mean, obviously, you had to be communicating with someone ahead to plan where you were going to be--

Browse: Oh yes, for instance, Edith was well-known in the folk art—even overseas—people knew about her and Sherry Hunt had heard of this gallery, The Egg and The Eye.

Benedetti: This [Sherry Hunt's gallery, Gallery 68] was the gallery in Nairobi.

Browse: And so she contacted Edith and said, "I've got this wonderful collection, this show coming. Would you be interested?" And gave a date that we would be here and Edith said, "Oh, yes, wonderful. Thank you very much." And it was just, "Come, come." [The show Donovan and Browse produced at The Egg and The Eye ran for five days, November 9 - 13, 1971.]

Benedetti: That was it. Ah-h-h.

Browse: And of course, that was the beginning of almost a catastrophe.

Benedetti: But it was also a sort of portend of things to come, probably! [Both laughing]

Browse: It was successful in that we got a half a page—I don't know if you've got it in your records—of the [*L.A. Times*] *Calendar*, a half a page [article]—they had never had such a big spread--

Benedetti: *The L.A. Times Calendar*.

Browse: And the crowds turned up in such profusion that they had to lock the front door to the restaurant and the gallery because the crowds were so—they had a policeman outside to monitor the crowds that were coming.

Benedetti: That's amazing! Now—so start—because I think this is just a fascinating story. Start with—I don't know—your arrival in L.A. and tell us the story of getting the show in--

Browse: Well, we arrived in L.A. on a Saturday [November 6, 1971]. Alan had some friends here and we stayed with them. And we went into the gallery, which was very impressive to us, **[25:00]** and the show [that was up at the time] would be coming down tomorrow, which was Sunday, we heard. There seemed to be people, a lot of people, in the gallery, and a few people in charge. No sign of Edith. And on Sunday afternoon, evening, six o'clock [the current] show ended and they were clearing things out. So we unpacked our boxes and put them downstairs in the gallery. And on Monday morning, we went there early and we thought, well, we'd start setting up. There were two galleries, an east gallery and a west gallery.

Benedetti: There wasn't a gallery on the third floor at that time. Is that right?

Browse: No, but there was something on the second floor.

Benedetti: The mezzanine.

Browse: The mezzanine, yes.

Benedetti: That was where the restaurant was.

Browse: And the members' lounge. [The members' lounge was actually on the third floor.]

Benedetti: Oh-h-h.

Browse: A big members' room; it was a huge big room. So we started thinking, "This is wonderful." It's got a construction that she had planned for the next show, but she was at the ranch. And nobody knew we were coming.

Benedetti: Oh-h-h.

Browse: Nobody knew.

Benedetti: Do you remember any of the people that were there that you met when you first arrived? Were they—were any of them people that you then worked with later on?

Browse: Well, I had to work with—I didn't meet Dorothy [Garwood] until the following Monday, but Steve Gardner was in charge of the shop, very nice young man, but, I mean, I think he didn't know who we were and he didn't like what we were doing and we just kind of knew what we were doing--

Benedetti: Nobody had told him--

Browse: We had a gigantic exhibition with panels and maps and, I mean, set-ups that were all planned because we had moved them from pillar to post--

Benedetti: You had already had this experience several other places.

Browse: Yes. We didn't know what to do. So Monday morning we go there and we start unpacking again and then there's a big hullabaloo. Edith arrives! "Oh, hello, hello," You know, great, kisses on cheeks.

Benedetti: She wasn't there first thing in the morning though.

Browse: No, she was about ten o'clock or so.

Benedetti: Oh, OK.

Browse: And remember the show's open on Tuesday night.

Benedetti: Yes.

Browse: So, "You can't be here. We're not going to be here." So we said, "Well, where are we going to be?" So she traipsed us upstairs to what was the members' room. It was a very large room.

Benedetti: Now where would that have been? I remember--

Browse: It was actually not on the mezzanine. It was on the top floor [the third floor].

Benedetti: Oh, it was on the top floor--

Browse: Yes, but it was—the top floor was the members' room and three offices.

Benedetti: Ah! OK. Yes, I think they had a group called the Associates or something [the Egg and the Eye Association].

Browse: Yes. And Edith had a room and Dorothy had an office. There was another office. And the members' room—which was a huge space. Plain, nice wooden floors. Windows overlooking the tar pits. "This is where you're going to have your show. And I'll be up in half an hour to set it up." So Alan says, "No, no, you don't know what—" "No, no. I set up every show," says Edith. So, Alan says, "You don't know what the merchandise is—and it all has categories and certain things go with certain things and certain maps and photographs are all related." So, she said, "No, no. I'll be up." So, he locked the door.

Benedetti: Which door?

Browse: To the members' room. And we locked her out.

Benedetti: I was going to ask—if you had to go up all those stairs to the members'—to the third floor—weren't there some pieces that were pretty heavy?

Browse: Yes, but we had--there was two Mexicans that were able to help.

Benedetti: Oh, OK.

Browse: And we carted everything—we were younger, for heaven's sake.

Benedetti: Yeah, of course.

Browse: [both laughing] Thirty years ago!

Benedetti: Yes. So you got everything upstairs.

Browse: We got everything up there and then we started unpacking--

Benedetti: And you locked the door!

Browse: And we knew how everything—we worked as a team. I mean, he set up one set of things; I did the others. I set up maps; he did, you know, photographs. We undid the jewelry—and Edith was locked out!

Benedetti: So—was she knocking on the door?

Browse: She was knocking on the door [both laughing]. It was havoc!

Benedetti: Oh my God!

Browse: We didn't stop for lunch. And by about 4:30, we let her in.

Benedetti: Now, there were other offices up there, though. I mean, didn't those people have to go back and forth?

Browse: No, the members' room was a room--

Benedetti: --was a separate--

Browse: --was a separate large exhibition room. Uh—I'm trying to think how big it was--

Benedetti: It wasn't as big as the gallery was later when it was the Craft and Folk Art Museum.

Browse: No—about half that almost. Yes, it was a big space.

Benedetti: And so you could lock the door.

Browse: So we locked the door. It had a door. And we set it up. And then when she came in at 4:30, she was bowled over. **[30:00]** She couldn't believe it. Because it was stunning. And she had to admit that she was wrong and we were right. And then, of course, she started touching everything.

Benedetti: That didn't happen very often.

Browse: And we finished everything. And we'd had a terrible theft in Denver.

Benedetti: Oh.

Browse: The night before we left. And a lot of our jewelry was stolen. And so I was making--

Benedetti: You knew about that.

Browse: Yes, yes. So I was making, threading beads and necklaces throughout the whole show.

Benedetti: Oh my God.

Browse: And we scattered beads into showcases as loose beads. No African beads had been seen in the West Coast yet. These were the ordinary trade beads, which were so common afterwards, all through the years. We brought them into L.A. And people were buying single beads to put on the end of a piece of leather or thong or something like that. But the show was an incredible success.

Benedetti: Now, what was the title of the show? Let's get that down just for the record.

Browse: You know, I don't remember, and it doesn't have it here [looking at the list of Egg and the Eye exhibitions].

Benedetti: Well, we'll fill that in later. ["Jewelry, Fashion, and Crafts from East Africa"] So—you got it all set up. Edith was bowled over.

Browse: As I say—the attendance was record-breaking. We sold a lot of the stuff—it was the end of the run, too, remember. [The Egg and The Eye Gallery was the last venue they had scheduled.] You know, I mean, we thought, "Oh, this is awful. We've come to the dregs." But everybody was thrilled. And then Edith approached Alan and said, would he consider joining her in The Egg and The Eye? And he said, "No." He said, "I've just gone to Africa and I've set up workshops and I'm increasing my workshops and I've developed certain outlets across the States now. You know, I'm going to really go into the wholesale export business and the development of crafts in East Africa. I want to really develop them. The people need guidance." So she was very distressed, very upset: "Are you sure you won't change your mind?" So she said—[or rather] he said "No." So then she said, "Well, what about John?" I was the second choice.

Benedetti: Were you there when this conversation was--

Browse: No, no. And he came to me [afterward] and he said, "You know, Edith will offer you a job." And I didn't have a job. Everything had fallen through. I really didn't know. It was the end of my—the [end of the] line--for me. I had no idea what was going to happen. I had spent two months traveling across America, perhaps one of the best times of my life. There was no past, there was no future, it was really living each day by the day. It was wonderful. Most people don't have that experience. And so she came and she said she'd like me to join her. So I said, "Well, that's interesting. I have a job being offered in New York"—just to kind of make it as though I'm not desperate. So she said, "Well, would you consider it?"

Benedetti: So what was she offering you exactly?

Browse: She was offering me her—I would be her associate. [John's title became Assistant Director.] But I'd have to meet Frank first—who was away. So Alan went back to the east coast. My car--I was staying by that time in Edith's guest suite, in the house. And my car was there.

Benedetti: Oh—this was in the house that she had over in [Westwood]--

Browse: Yes, not the final one—very nice house. And I met Frank. Well, Frank grilled me about budgets, about balance sheets. I had no idea what he was talking about! I'd never been a business person. But Edith saw something in the way that we worked and the way we displayed and the way we did things. She thought I was what she wanted and what Edith wanted Edith got.

Benedetti: Well, Frank--by this time she had had five years of success with The Egg and the Eye.

Browse: So Frank said "Yes." Well—success and success—you have to—financially it was a catastrophe.

Benedetti: Well, that was one of the things I was going to ask you. You know, the legend is—I wasn't around at that time, but the legend is that the museum never really—it wasn't that different from The Egg and The Eye because The Egg and The Eye never made any money, and I was going to ask you if that was true?

Browse: Well, we'll come to that in a moment.

Benedetti: Oh, OK. All right.

Browse: So I then said, "I'll join you, but I have to get back to New York to close my apartment," which was in Philadelphia—Bryn Mawr [35:00] no less—"and you'd have to pay for my fare and cover all the—"I had all my furniture and everything was there. "OK," says Edith.

Benedetti: You were smart!

Browse: So—I go back to the east coast. I close everything up. I get packers in—quite a lot of stuff, I mean, I brought [what amounted to] a home.

Benedetti: You had some African objects, did you still?

Browse: But I had furniture. I'd brought—

Benedetti: --your own personal stuff.

Browse: Yes, I'd brought all my personal furniture and stuff. Everything I had—books—and thousands of things—I gave all the books to the library.

Benedetti: So at this point you didn't have any intention of going back to Kenya.

Browse: To Kenya—no, I had no idea what was going to happen, but I wasn't going back. And so I arrived back in L.A. and the luggage was coming and being [put] in storage. I had to find an apartment. And then Edith—I think about the tenth or the twelfth day—she called me into her office and she said, "I'm handing out this memo to all the staff members." And I read it and it said, "Frank and I will be in Ethiopia for the next ten days—or two weeks"—he had a cattle ranch interest there—"and John will be in sole charge."

Benedetti: Oh, Lord. [Laughing]

Browse: I said, "Edith, you can't do this." And she said, "Yes, I can." I said, "But Edith you have Dorothy Garwood, who is your assistant director," and who was the contemporary craft liaison, whereas Edith was always the more [in charge of] folk art, and there was John-- [Steven] Gardner—can't remember his first name—anyhow, he was the manager of the shop, very efficient, very nice, very personable. I said, "You can't. I don't know anything about this." And she said [makes a thumping noise on the table], "It's a done deal." So

this memo goes to all the staff members and Frank and Edith leave and I'm at [her] home with her animals. And I have to go into The Egg and The Eye. This is now beginning to get ready for the Christmas rush. And I am looked at as *poison*.

Benedetti: The usurper.

Browse: Absolutely hatred. I mean you could feel it. It was so awful. It was just terrible.

Benedetti: You hadn't had a chance by this point to talk--

Browse: Nothing.

Benedetti: --to any of these staff. How many staff were there approximately? I mean--

Browse: Oh, there was Dorothy and then there was a secretary and there was Steven—Steven, his name was--[Gardner].

Benedetti: Steven Gardner.

Browse: And then there was another person. But then they had a group of volunteers.

Benedetti: Oh, I was wondering if you had volunteers then.

Browse: Yes, lots of volunteers. So the basic structure was not that many.

Benedetti: It sounds like the basic setup wasn't that different from what it was in the museum later on.

Browse: Except that we were open until ten at night.

Benedetti: Oh, my goodness!

Browse: And eleven on Saturdays.

Benedetti: Oh, so you had to have more people.

Browse: We had to have day staff and night staff. Because there's a restaurant open. You see, we used to be a luncheon place, and then we decided to open it up at night for dinner.

Benedetti: Yes, now--well, so let's continue--

Browse: So then we start—and I sat up in her desk, in her office, and I went through every document in her files. Everything that—all the shows that had been there, all the letters, answered the phone. I tried to think what I could learn.

Benedetti: Yes.

Browse: And I went downstairs and I watched them selling things. And I asked them to show me how to work the cash register, which was an old-fashioned one with buttons and a crank. They wouldn't even show me how to work the register.

Benedetti: Was this fellow Steven Gardner there?

Browse: They were just anti-me. He and Dorothy sat together [talking] every five minutes. He didn't know whether he was going to be fired. She didn't have any idea what her position was like. And here was this person who was the blue-eyed—I haven't got blue eyes, but I was the golden boy. I was just--. And—suddenly the accountant announces: "They paid for his trip to go all the way back [to New York] and the flight back and all of his luggage is being paid for."

Benedetti: So that-- **[40:00]**

Browse: And then they were broke. And it was always a financial problem.

Benedetti: You were getting the full picture. Even if you didn't realize it right away, you were really seeing [then] what—the way it probably was [a lot of the time]--

Browse: It was terrible.

Benedetti: So you stuck it out.

Browse: Well, it was such a rush for Christmas. The first Christmas I just ran around re-displaying stuff. I went to the storage room and saw stuff that was there and I kept bringing it out. It was all dead stock, but I didn't know. It looked wonderful to me. And I re-dis—I just displayed and displayed--everything I put out sold. I was just moving things all the time.

Benedetti: So you focused on that aspect of it

Browse: To begin with. Yes, and then I helped, of course, with the packing because we did gift-wrap. We had four-color papers with yarns. And we—everything was gift-wrapped. So that took us right the way through January. [Unintelligible] and a sale—and then, the big thing happens that I get taken to the first gift show—by Edith--where she goes round—this is at the Biltmore Hotel, where [on] the third and fourth floor all the rooms are stripped and all the importers bring out their wares—folkloric, contemporary craft, and the big halls down in the ballroom—and Edith goes round and is the big queen bee and she's buying. And then Frank calls me and he says, "You have to control everything that she spends; cut it by half."

Benedetti: Oh, my God.

Browse: I said, "What do I do?" He said, "Well, you go back the next day, and you take the invoices and you cut them in half." So I had to go back to the gift show and to all of these people, who had been so thrilled—"Oh, it's Mrs. Wyle, you know." And I said, "We're having to modify these orders. Instead of ten of these, we'll have five."

Benedetti: Oh, you cut the—

Browse: The quantities, yes the quantities.

Benedetti: --not the price, but the order. I see. Oh-h-h.

Browse: That was my first kind of introduction.

Benedetti: That was a trial by fire.

Browse: By fire.

Benedetti: So how did these vendors react--

Browse: Oh, they were furious. Yes, they were very upset.

Benedetti: Of course.

Browse: It took years [to re-establish our reputation]. But then they realized that we were still an important--

Benedetti: --place--

Browse: --place to sell to. But we never paid on time. I mean—30 days—a lot of them said, no—send it C.O.D. That was really difficult. And so I was in touch with the accountant. I can't recall who her first accountant was—another lady—[Ruth Schireson Levin] but then [unintelligible] Grace, who was married to an Indian guy. She was a wonderful person. But she used to say to me, "Talk to Frank. Get me some money." And I was on the phone every Thursday asking Frank for money.

Benedetti: Once a week you'd talk to Frank, on Thursdays.

Browse: Hm-hmn. And he'd say, "I can't talk to you now. I'll talk to you on Monday." Oh, my God!

Benedetti: Ummm.

Browse: It was a nightmare! And people came to us with wonderful things. I mean, there was a man called Barry Kitnick, who brought in African masks and things. And he was a beginner, and he had to pay for freight. And he used to come in and we used to take a few pieces, and he'd say, "How much money can you give me now?" We took stuff on consignment from him, but he said, "But I need some money to pay for *freight*."

Benedetti: And were you ever able to give him any?

Browse: Well, yes, I used to go upstairs and we used to see if I could give him a couple of hundred dollars, and then we jiggled around, and the whole thing—all the years I was there—was like a nightmare of financial worry.

Benedetti: Yes [both laughing]. I don't think it really ever changed.

Browse: No, but--

Benedetti: There were periods of time that were better than others, but it was always sort of on the edge, wasn't it?

Browse: But can you remember after January [1972] what the first shows [were that] we might have done? [Indonesian Art: Contemporary Batik Paintings; opened January 11, 1972.]

Benedetti: At The Egg and The Eye? I don't have a list of The Egg and The Eye [Gallery shows]. Well, on the timeline I really didn't put—oh, well, I have the first Craft and Folk Art Museum shows, but not The Egg and The Eye Gallery shows.

Browse: Yes. . . . You see, I'm thinking back, things like "Aboriginal Art"? **[45:00]** ["An Australian Aboriginal Arts and Crafts Exhibition" was at The Egg and The Eye August 21 – September 16, 1973.]

Benedetti: Well, there were—I mean, I can probably remember some. There was a show of African art put together by Katherine White, I think, who was a collector.

Browse: Katherine White. Then we did a very, very big show of African art from Vivian Burns—the importer from San Francisco. [Several shows produced by Vivian Burns were mounted at The Egg and The Eye.] But I'm trying to think back to the very first show we might have done [after I came in November 1971]--there was never just "a show came out and another one just went up." It was a *production*--and we didn't call them exhibitions. They were called "shows."

Benedetti: Shows, yes.

Browse: And there was a stage setting. Sometimes we changed the colors of the walls in one day.

Benedetti: Well, I wanted to ask you who—in a museum we call that [person who prepares the installation] a preparator. Who is doing the painting--?

Browse: We did.

Benedetti: --and preparation of--?

Browse: Steven, myself, a couple of the Mexicans, up on those 15-foot ladders, scared to death.

Benedetti: So, take me through it as if I had never been there—at the time of The Egg and The Eye—when you first arrived there, if you went in to the left—well tell me, maybe it was different--

Browse: You entered the door and there was a big stairs and you went straight upstairs to the bar and the two little sides of the restaurant. And there were two galleries downstairs, left and the right, the east and the west.

Benedetti: And those were galleries; were there distinctions about what you showed in each one?

Browse: Yes, more or less the east gallery, or the one to the west side on the right-hand side, was basically the main gallery for the main exhibition. And then part of the east gallery was also exhibition. The next section was the shop and then the back was the bookshop. I don't know if you ever knew the bookshop; it was a very small area and we had a bookshop that was extraordinary. I mean people came there and they found what they wanted. We did crafts, folk art, cultures, and design. And down the road were Hennessey and Ingalls [the large art and architecture bookstore, now in Santa Monica].

Benedetti: Yes, they were in the Beverly Wilshire Hotel.

Browse: Yes, but they were big.

Benedetti: Oh yes.

Browse: But people came to us because they found that we were much more friendly and today they [Hennessey and Ingalls], of course, are an institution.

Benedetti: Absolutely.

Browse: But they [people] used to come to us because they found what they wanted—and our bookshop did very well. But you only make 40% on a book.

Benedetti: Yes.

Browse: So it wasn't a profitable section.

Benedetti: But it was a way of attracting people--

Browse: --a draw—very, very big.

Benedetti: And probably Hennessey and Ingalls didn't really have that much on crafts and folk art at the time.

Browse: No, but [in our bookshop] there was always something. Little things. You know, we had gifties. But they were interesting. But, for instance, when we left, Alan and I, [at the end of the show in November 1971], we left everything remaining on consignment and [when I began working there], we started building that [the African items] up and I realized that we could make money from the shop. Remember, the exhibitions [at The Egg and The Eye Gallery] were also for sale.

Benedetti: But those were larger or more expensive items?

Browse: No. For instance, I'm thinking, here we did a show on Guatemalan textiles. I can't remember her name, very famous lady here She had a collection of Guatemalan stuff. So a lot of stuff was--

Benedetti: Oh! Caroline West!

Browse: Caroline West, yes, yes. She gave us a show for sale! And of course there were little things—and big, important things. And then, of course, knowing that there was a sale of Guatemalan [things], we found extra pieces from other people that were related that she didn't have. So the shop kind of became the exhibition [and the exhibition] became the shop. Edith's horror was to have a price on anything.

Benedetti: Oh-h-h.

Browse: She wouldn't put prices on—she had everything tucked underneath. And people walked around, absolutely thrilled with the whole environment of The Egg and The Eye. It was a “destination place.” **[50:00]** I mean, everybody knew about it, and they came in and if you had to wait for lunch, you had the gallery. And when you finished lunch, you had the gallery. Nobody walked out. You always had people. And she hid every price. She didn't want anything to look as though it was cheap.

Benedetti: It was always, I think, in her mind, an art gallery.

Browse: It was.

Benedetti: No matter what the--

Browse: No matter what. And I remember we fought all the time on this—having the prices available.

Benedetti: But you must have had a list behind the desk.

Browse: No, everything was priced underneath or tucked underneath. If you had an object--

Benedetti: And you didn't have anything you could refer to at the cash register?

Browse: No, everything was marked. Everything was marked, but it was always underneath or the tag was slipped under the object.

Benedetti: I see.

Browse: If it was a textile, you tucked it away. If it was a bracelet, you hid it into the bracelet. Edith just wouldn't—and people didn't know stuff was for sale. They kind of revered it so much—and then they would ask, is it--? So I said, “We have to make it obvious that everything is for sale.” Of course that was the beginning of her idea that we have to preserve some of the stuff, that it should be kept, bought, and form the beginning of the

museum collection—because it will never come back again. That was her deep wish and her project, her--

Benedetti: Let's just finish talking about the physical set-up first, and then I want to get back to the transition to the museum. So you would come in and in the east gallery you would have a smaller version of the west gallery so that there were--

Browse: Sometimes the exhibition went into both sides.

Benedetti: Into both. But behind that then, about the middle part--

Browse: The middle was kind of more shop.

Benedetti: Was more things that were obviously--

Browse: Shop.

Benedetti: When you say "shop," you mean it was more obviously for sale.

Browse: For sale.

Benedetti: And maybe there was a greater range of prices?

Browse: No, it just looked like a little shop because it was, you know, it was a little more cluttered.

Benedetti: I see. And the prices—were they more obvious?

Browse: More or less—and then the book shop of course.

Benedetti: And then the book shop.

Browse: Which was kind of a low area. It [the ceiling] wasn't high, like the front area, so it was very intimate, the book place, and we had these cases down the center, kind of--

Benedetti: With jewelry or with smaller--

Browse: Before we had the jewelry cases, we had kind of pedestal things that you could display on. But everything at the beginning was mainly for sale, I mean even when they had the totem show—was that the museum?

Benedetti: That was the first show at the museum. And it was actually by a Polish artist--

Browse: Yes, I know.

Benedetti: Let me ask you—the windows—how--

Browse: They were open completely.

Benedetti: But was there signage on the windows or—could you just look in and see that—it was obvious--

Browse: You could look in. We used the window as a display, yes. I don't think—I think once or twice we might have done something to barricade it, but not—it was always that you could walk—look right in.

Benedetti: And--

Browse: That was an important area. I mean that was--

Benedetti: Oh yeah. So then you could either go upstairs and have lunch--

Browse: Yes, there was nothing beyond there. There were offices.

Benedetti: So it was entirely the restaurant on the mezzanine—except for where you would go on upstairs.

Browse: Upstairs, yes. And there were showcases going up the stairs.

Benedetti: Oh yes.

Browse: Little glass showcases.

Benedetti: Little niches.

Browse: Niches.

Benedetti: So—and then I want you to talk about the restaurant, but let's go on upstairs then to the third floor. There was the gallery, where you and Alan had your first show.

Browse: Yes, and that was used not always as a gallery. It was a members' room, a meeting room, lecture room, movies there--

Benedetti: Yes, she had a film series.

Browse: A film series.

Benedetti: Was that Doug Edwards that was--

Browse: Doug Edwards, yes. It was very, very popular. Incredible--

Benedetti: And those films were not—craft films—they were--

Browse: Oh, it was before the festivals. It was really like the beginning of the film festivals. So everything that happened at The Egg and The Eye was a beginner. **[55:00]** I mean--I can't think of any exhibition that—well, she did a second African show, but everything was a “first-timer.” She introduced L.A. to a world they'd never seen. It was extraordinary when you think back on it.

Benedetti: Yes it is. And the world eventually caught up, but--

Browse: Well, people became so sophisticated. You know, it was a time when the Peace Corps were returning home, and they all brought little things that they wanted to sell.

Benedetti: Yes.

Browse: And so we got images of things that we'd never seen—from remote islands. And they came in and we offered them money and then we had things that no one had seen. They used to go to us and—[then when we couldn't buy them, they would go to the] United Nations shop--

Benedetti: Yes—the UNESCO shop.

Browse: [Sometimes lack of funds prevented us from purchasing excellent items and when] we couldn't pay for them [they were then offered to the UNESCO shop]. The UNESCO shop [was] very important in the development of L.A.'s awareness of the arts or crafts.

Benedetti: So there were a few offices upstairs—

Browse: And the members' room.

Benedetti: Were they the way they were later where they overlooked the tar pits?

Browse: Edith's one overlooked the tar pits [on] Wilshire Blvd. and the members' room. Only the front two.

Benedetti: Oh, the members' room was at the front also?

Browse: Yes.

Benedetti: And then the other offices were at the back.

Browse: Were tucked back. And then of course there was a preparation room and behind the restaurant there was—downstairs behind the shop was storage.

Benedetti: And where you wrapped things.

Browse: Where we wrapped and where we received shows—and sent them back. I mean, the mess there was unbelievable because they used to tear a show out without checking it out. They used to just tear a show out and then when it was over [and] the next show [was up], we had to find all these objects to return or to pay for. But it was all done in a matter of "Get the show out; the next one's in." . . . We used to work right through Sunday night and Monday night.

Benedetti: You mean you didn't go home to go to bed?

Browse: Hardly. I mean we passed midnight--

Benedetti: Yeah.

Browse: I mean it was—tears—I can't tell you the number of times there were tears—I mean, hysterics.

Benedetti: I find myself wondering if sometimes things weren't lost or--

Browse: They were! And then we had to pay for them. Because we had all these sheets. That was my job to check everything off afterwards and then pack it and get it ready for the people. And this is missing and this is missing. That's missing. What do you do? You look up the sales slips to see if anybody had forgotten to mark it in the book and if it wasn't, we paid for it!

Benedetti: So, I guess, eventually, you got along with the original staff—or did some of them leave or--?

Browse: Dorothy [Garwood] left. [Garwood left in 1975.]

Benedetti: Oh yes, I meant to ask about Dorothy in particular.

Browse: I don't know how long she stayed. She went to the Municipal Art Gallery—Barnsdall—I think she felt much happier there.

Benedetti: She was a curator there was she? Was she a curator there at Barnsdall?

Browse: I don't know what she did.

Benedetti: I don't—I'm just realizing I don't [either]--

Browse: Dorothy and I got along very well toward the end, but to begin with—we were polite. As the years passed, we became good friends because we both had to put up with so much. But Steven left fairly soon afterward. And then there was a series of people that came in. I mean, Claire Oksner, who I still am friendly with. She was part of the book department. And then she left. I ended up having to do all the book ordering. I used to sit up all night ordering books and then I found I couldn't order from these people. We hadn't paid for them! So we had to find publishers--with interesting books [to whom we didn't owe money].

Benedetti: So you were learning a lot.

Browse: You learned as you went.

Benedetti: You learned to work the cash register.

Browse: Oh, we got an electric one eventually. But it was interesting because Edith gave the impression that she knew everything but she didn't. **[1:00:00]** We were given Hungarian hunters' coats. Somebody brought in a collection of hunting coats from—made of felt—from Hungary.

Benedetti: Made of felt. Oh, OK.

Browse: Yes, felt. None of us knew anything about this. So we had to kind of quick do some research. There were times when she said, "I don't anything [about this]. What do you think this is? It was so wonderful because neither of us knew what we were doing [laughing]. But you learned. But we didn't have a computer [the Internet] to go to.

Benedetti: Yes, I was wondering what you did. I mean, did you have certain people that you called on? There were certainly a lot of experts who were associated with--

Browse: There were some people. Objects like [those from] Mexico, Guatemala, New Mexico, baskets, African stuff, yes we had people we could call. But sometimes we had nobody.

Benedetti: There should have been a librarian around there!

Browse: No [there was no librarian]

Benedetti: [But you had something] called the Association Library.

Browse: Yes, yes.

Benedetti: So you did have those [about 300 books] to [use as a resource].

Browse: We had that, yes.

Benedetti: Yeah, good.

Browse: But I mean, for instance, people brought us [at The Egg and The Eye Gallery] textiles from the Philippines—that was the beginning of the big movement. Everybody was interested in Philippine textiles. And I don't think we had a book on it at that time. And we put them [the textiles] up and people told us what islands they came from and then immediately somebody came in and said, "Oh no, that's not this tribe and that's not that tribe; it was this island." Oh, people were only too happy to correct you.

Benedetti: Yes, I'm sure [both laughing].

Browse: Which was interesting!

Benedetti: Yes and maybe some of them would—well of course you didn't have memberships at that time, really, except for this Association. That was a membership organization.

Browse: But there was a naiveté about the place and once you became a museum and you had to put on white gloves and you had to get a registrar, something changes. It became like a religious experience. And the naiveté—or the joy—of crafts and folk art—was lost, I think. You go into a museum today—it's like going to a church, isn't it? Mostly?

Benedetti: Uh, it certainly has been. I think there have been some changes in recent years, but--

Browse: Recently.

Benedetti: But I think for a lot of people museum-going or even collecting was a kind of religious experience, yes.

Browse: But the Gallery at The Egg and The Eye wasn't. It was like an open heart embracing [you]. You know that we had music *all the time!*

Benedetti: Oh-h-h.

Browse: And it had to be Baroque music.

Benedetti: Oh it did? [Laughing] That could get a little tiresome after a while!

Browse: I thought I would go crazy! [After I started at The Egg and The Eye], we had music of cultures. If there was a Mexican show, we would sometimes play at the lunchtime, the music would be Mexican. When we had a Balinese show, UCLA brought their Gamelan group and they played outside. You know, we had activities that were related to the shows.

Benedetti: Yes, I think Edith was always interested in, well--she's the one who I first heard use the phrase "the cultural context." She said—I think she said--that it was Patricia Anawalt [or Altman?] that mentioned it to her—and—but she always had this idea that she wanted to "feed all of the senses."

Browse: All the senses, yes.

Benedetti: So it wasn't just a matter of bringing in the particular cultural attributes—it was feeding the visitor [the whole gallery experience]. **[1:05:00]**

Browse: You know, it was the seventies—that was past the "hippie" group, but it was still Birkenstock, huh?

Benedetti: It was still—no that was still going [on]--

Browse: We used to have people come in and sit on the floor and just sit there—just to *be* there.

Benedetti: Oh-h-h. That's wonderful.

Browse: I mean it was unbelievable. And I don't know if you knew—Gary Knodel [Gerhardt Knodel]. He was from Cranbrook. He was a textile designer. He taught at Cranbrook—very famous man.

Benedetti: Oh, I know who you mean.

Browse: That was [in the days of] The Egg and The Eye. He created some wonderful environments in the museum. And—for instance—they had to string hooks right along the walls every half-inch and he did tension wires across and he expanded environmental

spaces in fabric. And people just came there and sat there all day. ["Cranbrook Fibreworks," June 25 – August 4, 1974, a group show from Cranbrook organized by Knodel, who was the head of the Fiber Department at Cranbrook Academy of Art.]

Benedetti: You know, we haven't talked very much about contemporary crafts and you did mention Dorothy Garwood, that that was her sphere, more or less. Tell a little bit about that.

Browse: Well, it was something new to me because, you know, I didn't know much about American contemporary craft. But—I'm trying to think when I first did the gift shows—we had weavers, for instance, who came in and brought scarves and shawls, not big weavings, and that was the first introduction [when] I came—but then there was a time when people were doing huge wall pieces, with fibers and ropes and things, and then I remember there was an enormous conference. I don't know if it was here or the east coast, but they found that all these weavings were sagging from the weight. Nobody had understood the structure of these things.

Benedetti: How to support them—uhm-hm.

Browse: It was becoming a real problem. We had Mexican carpets, for instance, which were Oaxacan and traditional. And then we got people who went down there and brought up contemporary pieces, but woven by the Oaxacan people, so we were bringing up a contemporary image of a traditional craft. So that was good, you know, we were watching that.

Benedetti: That was somewhat similar to what Alan did, I guess, with the African [things].

Browse: Exactly, yes, yes. But then you had some wonderful wood makers, I mean, "Mr. Chair"—what's his name?

Benedetti: Well--Bob Stocksdale?

Browse: Sam Maloof.

Benedetti: Oh, Sam Maloof, yes, yes.

Browse: Well he and Edith were great friends.

Benedetti: Yes, he was involved really from the beginning, wasn't he?

Browse: From the beginning, yes. I don't know if he was on the board or--

Benedetti: Well, he was on the [museum] board later—not at the very beginning--

Browse: Later—but not at the beginning--

Benedetti: No.

Browse: We had his work in the early days. We had an extraordinary exhibition. Edith had sent Vivian Burns to Africa [I don't mean she paid her way] and we'd had an African show and Vivian Burns had seen coffins made in West Africa--

Benedetti: Oh, yes.

Browse: --that came over. They were shown years later in the east coast but we had them--

Benedetti: They were at the Seattle Art Museum just a few months ago [when I was visiting there]!

Browse: But we were the first people who ever, ever, ever had them!

Benedetti: Yes, yes—from Ghana?

Browse: Ghana, yes. And we had them downstairs. We had Mercedes; we had a big groundnut [cashew nut]; a 747; we had a ship.

Benedetti: Yes.

Browse: It was the exhibition, "From the Cradle to the Grave." And [upstairs] we had rocking—what do you call them?—cradles upstairs. Sam Maloof and [other] great wooden people created this most wonderful collection of contemporary cradles! [The show upstairs was "Cradles: A Contemporary Collection," February 19 – March 31, 1974.]

Benedetti: Yes. Now there was a contemporary crafts—so-called contemporary craft--movement that had been going on, basically, since the end of World War II, and really the G.I. Bill helped with that a great deal because a lot of artists went to college and--

Browse: Well, which was the school here? Oh, that wasn't a craft school; that was the Chouinard [School of] Art wasn't it?

Benedetti: Well, I don't know if Chouinard—I think Chouinard probably did teach some crafts, **[1:10:00]** but I know that Laura Andreson, for example--oh my--I was going to say she was at USC. She was either at USC or UCLA. [She was at UCLA.] And I wanted to mention the organization, which was (and still is) based in New York, the American Craft Council.

Browse: The American Craft Council, oh yes.

Benedetti: And the woman who was the founder of that—she actually visited CAFAM—Aileen Osborn Webb, yes. [On February 19, 1978, CAFAM gave a dinner party honoring visiting ACC board members including Mrs. Webb.]

Browse: Yes, uh-huh.

Benedetti: So—I'm sure you probably had their magazine, it was *Craft Horizons*, and--

Browse: Oh yes, and I mean Dorothy [Garwood] was on the cusp of that. She had the first—definitely in L.A.—the first glass show.

Benedetti: Ah-h-h!

Browse: --ever in Los Angeles! I have a little piece.

Benedetti: Wow!

Browse: And we had a Dale Chihuly piece--

Benedetti: Oh! Really!

Browse: --that was on a sandbox, maybe . . . about nine feet by about four feet sandbox. And then these huge globes with a long projection. And they were just nestled into—they were in gold on sand [in] the sandbox . . . And people looked at this—I mean they'd never seen anything like it before.

Benedetti: No.

Browse: It was completely abstract glass.

Benedetti: And this was--Dorothy Garwood had something to do with that?

Browse: Garwood, yes. I don't—I didn't write that one down. It was called "The Glass Show," I think. ["West Coast: New Frontiers in Glass," February 13 – March 18, 1973.] And the—oh my gosh—the catalog for that was with Mylar paper so it looked like reflected glass.

Benedetti: Oh, I don't think we have that in the archives.

Browse: Did you know Max King?

Benedetti: Oh, well yes!

Browse: Was she part of before the craft museum or--

Benedetti: No, after.

Browse: She was after.

Benedetti: I think she started in '77, something like that.

Browse: Because we had [a number of] people [designers] before her—she was brilliant!

Benedetti: She was—but you, obviously, you must have had—well, Milt Zolotow, I know, was one of the people who designed--

Browse: Milt Zolotow, yes. Yes, there were people who came up with ideas. No, there was—we had a big Laura Andreson show. ["Laura Andreson, Ceramics," June 26 – July 22, 1973.] But that was nearer the time of the Museum, wasn't it?

Benedetti: I don't—I don't think so.

Browse: I think it was very close to [the time of] the museum, and I said to Edith, "Frank should buy that collection as an—"

Benedetti: --as an investment.

Browse: --an investment for the museum. But they didn't.

Benedetti: Well, I suppose at that time they were [just] beginning to think about collections and about--

Browse: And there was a very big show called "Jewelry: USA," which was a traveling show—contemporary jewelry—Arline Fisch and all that group. ["Jewelry USA," May 14 – June 16, 1985"]

Benedetti: Yes.

Browse: And it was traveling all the way through the States. We had that. So that was jewelry, contemporary jewelry.

Benedetti: Yes. Before we go any further—you haven't talked about The Egg—the Egg in the The Egg and The Eye.

Browse: Well--

Benedetti: Tell me about it as if I didn't know.

Browse: I got there when the famous lady, who made the omelettes, wasn't there [anymore].

Benedetti: Oh, Rodessa [Moore] had left already.

Browse: Rodessa had left.

Benedetti: I never met her either, but she must have been fabulous.

Browse: I never met her. She had just gone, and we had—what was his name? Giovan—Giuseppe? What was his name?

Benedetti: Oh there were--

Browse: Big, big black fat man—Mexican guy. He was wonderful! Except they were all on drugs!

Benedetti: Oh-h!

Browse: But he threw out these omelettes—just tah!—tah!—tah! [Gesturing like throwing omelette mixture into a pan]—Three eggs and a tablespoon of water. Edith insisted on it.

Benedetti: So he continued [Rodessa's format]—they didn't expand too much from that right away.

Browse: No, to begin with when I was there, it was only omelettes. And I think there was a salad?

Benedetti: Salad and bread.

Browse: Salad and bread—two breads—there was the one with the--

Benedetti: The one with the raisins.

Browse: The one with the raisins from the bakery just down the road—Brown's Bakery.

Benedetti: Which bakery?

Browse: Brown's Bakery.

Benedetti: Brown's Bakery—OK.

Browse: And a kind of a baguette. And Edith always wanted to expand the menu. I think they thought they had to when the big scare came with cholesterol--

Benedetti: Oh.

Browse: And people were so, "One egg a week is more than you should have." And that scared them **[1:15:00]** so I remember they did a papaya with curried shrimp inside it. That was one of the first salad things. They did some soups, I think. But then the egg thing [the popularity of eggs] came back again. Did you ever see the—have you got the [Egg and The Eye] newspapers [in the archives]?

Benedetti: Yes, I do.

Browse: I mean the menu was a newspaper!

Benedetti: It was the centerfold of the newspaper—the newsletter.

Browse: And the newsletter came out regularly.

Benedetti: Yes, I think I have most of those in the archives.

Browse: I mean it's unbelievable that somebody did that.

Benedetti: Yes, now—that must have originated in the restaurant.

Browse: No, it was originated—well, the idea—Edith got that from someone else, I think—and that was part of the—you know, they didn't change the restaurant section of it. But the newspaper—was it two sheets?

Benedetti: I think it was—oh yeah—it was--

Browse: Sometimes. How often did they do that?

Benedetti: It was, you know, a regular, I guess you'd call it—

Browse: Tabloid.

Benedetti: --a tabloid type, with at least four sheets, and sometimes more.

Browse: I don't remember how many times we changed it [it was more or less a quarterly] except I was involved once only in it, because [the newsletter editor had gone away] and Edith had [just] come back [from her China trip so she and I had to cut and paste it up, so we did it ourselves—with Chinese paper cut-outs to fill in the gaps!] **[Telephone rings]** and she'd decided she would-- **[pause in recording]**

Browse: Talking about contemporary things—there was a very famous jeweler here. Her name is Leah Rubin [sometimes referred to as Le O Rubbens] and she's [now] about 90 years old and she used to make the most extraordinary silver organic pieces of jewelry that everybody collected at that time and she was like one of our stalwarts. People came in [just] to buy her jewelry. I can't remember if we gave her a big show, but then I'm thinking back to Laurel Burch, who is today a really well-known designer of many lines, but she was doing clothing at that time and we did contemporary caftans. Another girl called Alex Lapidus, very famous, and she did wall hangings and clothing. So we had clothing—we had a Japanese lady who took parts of kimonos [and made them] into jackets. So we did clothing. We actually had a clothing line. We had a little dressing room. Where did we have the dressing room? I don't remember.

Benedetti: Well I remember--

Browse: Maybe it was the ladies' room.

Benedetti: Yes, there was—when I came in '77 [actually '76]—of course that was the Museum by that time, but the shop was on the left, and there was a little—there was a ladies' room (I don't know where the men's room was) [both laughing], but there was a restroom sort of on the right and there was a dressing area in there.

Browse: But, you know, she liked clothing—Edith—she loved jewelry. Ceramics—I remember the very first time we were having a show and I remember it so well because I took a pedestal and I took a large, iron-glazed red vase and stuck it on the pedestal and she [Edith] came into the shop and she said—she looked at this--we'd never had a ceramic on a pedestal!

Benedetti: Really! You were the first!

Browse: Yes. She said, "Ah-h! Yes I suppose it deserves to be there." Because [at that time] ceramics were not [considered] art.

Benedetti: No, but--

Browse: They'd never been taken seriously. And there was this beautiful red thing and I put it on a little pedestal about this high—and I put it there and she said, "Ah-h." You know, the things that you think back to today: craft and art—we had them divided—and you know they're all [considered] art today.

Benedetti: Let me ask you: were you still running your own business?

Browse: When I went back there a second time, yes.

Benedetti: The second time. But during this first time, you weren't.

Browse: No, no.

Benedetti: But you were in touch—Alan would come back once in a while?

Browse: He was coming back, but I didn't run the business.

I left [The Egg and The Eye Gallery] the first time [1:20:00] because Judy Weinstein from the [shop at the] Natural History Museum was doing a gigantic African show down at the Natural History Museum—"100 Treasures from the Zaire National Museum." And she wanted to do something unique [which was] to change the shop into a completely African shop for the run of the show.

Benedetti: Oh, she was running the shop?

Browse: In the Natural History Museum. Nowadays when you have a major exhibit, you have a shop that's devoted to--

Benedetti: Yes.

Browse: But [at the time] this was unique. And she said, "I'm going to strip the shop and I want you to come and run the shop." So I said to her, "Well, I don't know if I can do it." So I cabled Alan that I've got this opportunity to do this, run the shop for them. Can he supply? And I get a cable back—there's no faxes, there's no e-mails--

Benedetti: Right [laughing].

Browse: "African Heritage"—that's his company—"completely destroyed by fire."

Benedetti: Oh-h-h! Oh no!!

Browse: "*Unable to help.*"

Benedetti: Oh, my goodness!

Browse: And I had more or less given in my notice to Edith.

Benedetti: Oh-h-h, oh.

Browse: So I didn't know what to do, and I thought, the only thing I can do is to go to New York-- because I know all the importers—and explain what we're doing and get everything on consignment, and I more or less handed my notice in. And Alan cabled back that the American community in Kenya had helped. All the ladies had come together and the shop was being re-formed--the fire was out. Everything was destroyed. And so he started exporting stuff to me for--

Benedetti: So he was able to help you with that?

Browse: Yes.

Benedetti: Oh-h.

Browse: And by building up the export again because I was paying him—they [the Natural History Museum] were paying me—we developed the shop down there and I gave up The Egg and The Eye. And then I realized that I was in the import business, so maybe I should continue with that.

Benedetti: And that's how you really--

Browse: That's how I got into the import business.

Benedetti: --got started there.

Well, I would like to hear a little bit more from you about some of the major players, especially Edith and Frank. You've mentioned them, but—and of course you told us how you met Edith and so on, but you were with The Egg and The Eye for over five years and that last year [that you were there, 1975-76,] was the transition into the museum.

Browse: Yes, I saw the writing on the wall. I think when they talked about the building they were going to put up—you were part of the—when the plans for the new building came up. [John is speaking here about the plans that were being drawn up before he left CAFAM the second time in 1989.]

Benedetti: Oh yes.

Browse: The Tower.

Benedetti: The Museum Tower.

Browse: And I looked at what they had designed for the Shop and I said, "This is ridiculous." The shop had been designed into three sections—one as you came from the elevator would be an internal shop and then there'd be a bridge overlooking the galleries—like a glass bridge, very contemporary—and then an enormous circular glass gallery overlooking the tar pits. And I said, "There's no way you can run a shop this divided like this." You'd

have no security. There's no wall space. And I just remember thinking, "This whole project is just not for me anymore." And so I felt that it was time to kind of get out again.

Benedetti: Well, that was the second time [in 1989]. But [now] think back to how it was the first time [1971-1976] and if you were going to tell people what Edith was like--

Browse: Well, if I had to say five people in one's life who've influenced you more [than any others]—the first is your mother I suppose, hmh? Most people would say that. I would say that [for me] Edith comes second or third. She was just inspirational! Difficult--I mean there was a time in which Edith and I didn't talk to each other.

Benedetti: Ah-h-h.

Browse: We sent notes to each other. And "You tell Edith that," and "You tell John that." I mean, when you think [about it], she should have fired me!

Benedetti: Do you remember what that was about?

Browse: No, it was always something so petty, so small, so insignificant. She always wanted her own way. I mean, always. **[1:25:00]** She didn't like ever to be—in fact, if you came up with an idea and you kept dropping little ideas, she would pick them up. And sometimes she used them: "Oh my, I've come up with. . . ." I would *never*, ever conflate that and say, "That was my idea." It was just a way of letting her develop her ideas.

Benedetti: You knew that that would happen, in other words, if you--

Browse: Yes. I think the part that I loved Edith most about was she was so vulnerable. You know, she was not a strong person. She—it's awful to say years later—but she was very insecure. And her mother-in-law I met. She was a dragon.

Benedetti: Oh-h.

Browse: Frank's mother.

Benedetti: She had a pretty strong mother also.

Browse: Her mother was--

Benedetti: Rose, I think her name was.

Browse: --terribly strong! Frank was a little man and Edith kind of was really squashed. I don't know if you ever saw her paintings?

Benedetti: Yes, a few of them.

Browse: They're dark, very dark. Strong, but kind of fearful I felt. And I always felt that she was kind of—she was happy when she was surrounded by all those things—and she had her wonderful little children, but I think she lost herself in this creative thing—not so much that

it was creative, but it was cultures that she embraced that weren't a threat to her. All these different people that came in, like the Mexican people--we had this show from Mexico and these people came up. She embraced them. She had an Ethiopian secretary; she loved her.

Benedetti: Yeah, Merat [Kebede].

Browse: I mean she gave so much love. I don't know how much she gave to her kids. I mean, I never asked her. They all loved her, but I don't know if she was that warm to them. But she gave out to so many other people, I think, this incredible feeling of warmth.

Benedetti: Yes.

Browse: Even when we were arguing, I mean, I—it was wonderful [like a cat and mouse game!!--but what could I do? Ian [Barrington], who was the director of The Egg and The Eye [the restaurant], he used to get up early mornings sitting in his office and I used to go up the back stairs and sit for half an hour and he used to kind of despair the way he was treated by Frank and Edith.

Benedetti: Yes, Ian was the manager of the restaurant--in the eighties I think. That must have been when you came back [the second time].

Browse: They wanted him to develop the restaurant. They wanted a dinner menu. He tried so hard and we used to have food tastings. I don't know if you ever knew that--

Benedetti: No!

Browse: Oh, we had these food tastings with—what was her name?—she designed canopies and--

Benedetti: Gere Kavanaugh.

Browse: Gere Kavanaugh! What does Gere Kavanaugh know about food—and what's his name who was the board director?

Benedetti: Uh—I don't know.

Browse: All these people who sat there--

Benedetti: Mort Winston--are you--no?

Browse: No, but other people. And they used to—Ian used to come out with four or five dishes and we used to sit upstairs and he'd present them. I mean, food critics are food critics. I enjoy food. I've traveled--a lot. But I'm not a food critic. And then you'd get them: [making tasting noises] tasting: "I think it's lacking. . . well, what would you say it's lacking?" And I mean, he's standing there being just broken down by these ideas or descriptions, or--no one was constructive.

Benedetti: But was that his idea to have the tastings, because--

Browse: No, they wanted it.

Benedetti: Oh-h-h.

Browse: They wanted to be in control of everything.

Benedetti: Because he was pretty serious about food.

Browse: Very, very, very serious. And sometimes before the tasting, he'd have—he'd say, "Come up for lunch." And I'd run up to his office and he'd have two little plates and he'd say, "This is what I'm going to give them. What do you think?" Presentation, everything. Oh he was very—but he was treated very badly. And do you know that they never said good-bye, a nice farewell. **[1:30:00]** And they never thanked him for his [service].

Benedetti: Well, he was quite ill I guess [at the time that the Museum closed and the restaurant had to close forever in 1989].

Browse: He was very ill.

Benedetti: I know that Patrick was fairly close to him.

Browse: Very, yes. But even though Frank—they were, I don't know—they were the directors, you know, and we were the workers [laughing].

Benedetti: But there was a kind of chasm between—

Browse: Chasm, yes.

Benedetti: Yes, I think everybody on the staff felt that.

Browse: I mean, Frank's been a successful businessman, but I think he realized that this was a losing proposition and, I mean, he put in a fortune into that place.

Benedetti: Yes, it seemed like there was a rescue that always happened at the end of the year I suppose. But it was never really quite enough to make things--you know, it was awfully successful [in terms of prestige] and yet we were always kind of on the edge [financially]. There were times when we didn't get paid.

Browse: Yeah, I know. I mean, I think it was the second time I was there, some man came from Atlanta, and he asked who was in charge. It was a Sunday. I used to work on Sunday. And he wanted--he asked me—and I said, "Well, let's have lunch." He was going to open up some kind of similar organization. I mean he was just enchanted by the Craft and Folk Art Museum. And we talked and talked and I said, "Financial problems all the time." He said, "You know, a museum is only as good as its board." And I said, "Well, we've got

a board. I know they make promises.” I said, “But I don’t think they ever come up with the—.” He said, “That’s the trouble.”

Benedetti: Well, I can remember talking to—I don’t remember his name, but the fellow [Robert Bishop] who was the head of the museum in New York—it used to be the Museum of American Folk Art [now the American Folk Art Museum] in New York. I had to see him for some reason and I remember him saying, “Nobody gets on my board with less than—” “whatever it was—I think it was, like, \$20,000 [\$10,000] a year at that point.

Browse: And then the ability to get fundraisers.

Benedetti: Yes—and that was an annual amount that was expected. Now our board—I don’t know what it is now, but for a very, very long time—all the time that I was on the staff—the amount that was expected of the board was \$2,500—two thousand five hundred--*and* if you didn’t have that in cash to give, then you could give some kind of “in-kind” donation.

Browse: Oh, that’s ridiculous!

Benedetti: Yes, it absolutely was ridiculous. So—I did want to talk a little bit more about Frank because he was always kind of a mystery to me.

Browse: He was always polite to me, I mean, very, very polite.

Benedetti: Oh yes.

Browse: And even years later whenever I bumped into him, he always came across, shook hands, and said hello. I remember he called me down to his office. I hadn’t been there more than about a year and we were having trouble with staff and it’s very difficult to fire staff.

Benedetti: Oh sure.

Browse: Really difficult. And we had a young girl working for us, so beautiful, rich family. She’d done something terrible. It was obviously something I’d warned her [about]. So I said, “I’m sorry. You have to go.” And Frank called me down, “You can’t. I mean, she’s important. Her father’s important.” Anyhow, they did let her go. But he called me down and he said to me, “John, you’re putting the fear of death into everybody’s life here.” I said, “But nobody’s doing anything.” He said, “But you’re doing everything.” I said, “Yes, because I set things to be done and they’re not done. It’s quicker to do it yourself.” He said, “That’s the wrong thing [to do]. You have to delegate. You have to delegate. You *have* to delegate. You can’t do it all yourself.” And I said, “It’s impossible because we’ve got volunteers who don’t turn up. They phone up at the last minute and say, ‘Oh, I forgot, I’ve got a hair appointment or a dental appointment’ [1:35:00] and then *who* is going to work? You find that there’s nobody else, so *you* volunteer. You’re not down [on the

schedule] for working in the shop that day; you have records to do or letters to write or something to do." I said, "That's the way I did it." And he said, "You have to delegate." But that was the hardest thing was having temporary staff.

Benedetti: Yes.

Browse: When I returned the second time I said, "I'll only return if I have an assistant manager who I can rely on (that was Carol [De Runtz Day])." [Susan Skinner had been hired by Ann Robbins as her assistant and she stayed on as Associate Shop Manager until 1984.] [So then] I said, "Carol, you're going to be assistant manager, but your first job is to be in charge of volunteers—more than anything else." And she had that job and it nearly drove her mad. I said, "I don't want to know anything about the [volunteer] staff. You are assistant manager—and the whole volunteer thing comes under your business."

Benedetti: [You were saying], "You're the human resources person!"

Browse: And that was difficult because, you know, I mean, she was living away. And I was living so close—well, at that time I was living in Eagle Rock, but--you can't do everything. It was very difficult. Volunteer staff is very difficult. And the other big thing I had with Frank was he never wanted to pay people very much at the very beginning. We had a commission sales incentive. You got a percentage of your sales, so every sale had to have a page. You know, we wrote them up, they weren't computerized; and you had your initials and at the end of the day the accountant had to take them all out and list all the sales that each person had done--

Benedetti: A great deal more paperwork was involved.

Browse: Oh, well--deducting the sales tax for each member—you had to do this—and then there was this fight during the sales part of the business to sell as much as you can because you would get your commission. And we had this one girl who ended up at the County [at LACMA]—I don't remember her name—she had her hair all done up in a kind of Austrian plait—and she was the jewelry sales person. She *forced* people into buying things. She was just a powerhouse. And people kind of ended up, "Oh, yes. . . ." And she was a sales person—superb. But we had a policy that you could bring stuff back, but you could get credit, but not money, and the amount of stuff that came back—until one day one of the accountants said, "Do you know, this is unbelievable. All the returns" -- Janet!—"all the returns are Janet's sales. We've paid her commission on these sales, so when they're returned, that commission should be deducted--"

Benedetti: --from the next paycheck, yes.

Browse: --so the next paycheck she got almost nothing. And there was havoc!

Benedetti: Well, but that's logical.

Browse: So when I kind of—there was a big panic—and Patrick—Frank called me, “What’s all this going on?” And I said, “Well, this is [unintelligible] should be noticed.” “Well, you should have picked that up earlier.” How was I supposed to pick up these things? I hadn’t even thought of returns and commissions and things. [There was no sales manual; John wrote one.]

Benedetti: So, it sounds like Frank was really an advisor to you in a lot of things.

Browse: He was, no, he really was. I mean, to this day I’m not a business person. You know, I don’t know how to balance a checkbook. I don’t. No, I don’t. I say it because I’ve never had to and I never have done. That’s the way I work. But he did teach me quite a lot.

Benedetti: Let’s talk a little bit about the last year or so before you left the first time, when it was-- when the Gallery---let me put it this way: when did you first become aware that they were serious about turning the Gallery into a museum? You know, what was happening that made you realize that this was going to happen?

Browse: Well, the—Edith had the concept soon after I was there—the first exhibitions—she said, you know, we shouldn’t allow this stuff to be sold. It should be part of a museum; it’s too important. And then they went and started the nonprofit foundation. I have no idea why it took so long [to get the Museum started], what—about two, three years? **[1:40:00]**

Benedetti: Yeah.

Browse: Or more.

Benedetti: Well, I think—I don’t know when exactly they started [the effort], but it was in 1973 that they got the approval of the IRS for the nonprofit--.

Browse: '73, yes.

Benedetti: Yes and that’s what—she always celebrated that as being the first year [of the museum].

Browse: But it wasn’t.

Benedetti: But no, it took—well, I mean, she had to—they had to hire people that, you know, they needed--

Browse: Yes, you say '73 was the--

Benedetti: --when the IRS gave them the nonprofit--

Browse: And when did--when did we become a—have the first Museum exhibition?

Benedetti: Well, the first exhibition that was labeled as the Craft and Folk Art Museum—at that time they would say “the Craft and Folk Art Museum Incorporating the Egg and The Eye”—but the first one that was labeled that way was in August of '75. So it took at least two years—actually it must have taken a year--

Browse: When did I leave?

Benedetti: You left a year after that—in June [March] I think of '76. So you were there for the start!

Browse: Yes, but--

Benedetti: And Patrick was hired--

Browse: And Patrick was hired because--she had great delight--and she said, “We have to have somebody with a museum background.”

Benedetti: Uh-huh.

Browse: And I don't have any credentials for that—you know, I mean I'd been running the shop very successfully. In fact the shop was making the money to pay for the lights and water and everything.

Benedetti: For everything else.

Browse: She introduced me to Patrick and she said he will be the museum director.

Benedetti: You hadn't met him before he was actually hired?

Browse: And she said to me, “I can offer you the job as the Museum Shop Manager.” That's, you know, what I thought I was [already] doing. So I said, “Yes, yes, that's fine.”

Benedetti: Before that you were what you said was “her associate.”

Browse: Associate. I didn't have a title--

Benedetti: You didn't have a title?

Browse: I didn't have a—did I have a card? I don't think we had cards. She just called me her associate. She always introduced me as her associate.

Benedetti: OK.

Browse: And so I thought, well, “Museum Shop Manager,” that'll be fine. And it [the Shop] was going to be given more prominence. It was already developing into a place to go, to buy something, you know, if you want something, go to The Egg and The Eye, go to the Craft Museum. [Pause.] I just felt that the time had come, you know?

Benedetti: But you didn't leave immediately. You stayed on for almost a year. [Both laughing]
Was that because you were looking for—or, well, you were thinking of starting your own business at that point. So, what did you think of Patrick when you met him?

Browse: He seemed kind of nice. He seemed very young and very blond. And I kind of thought--
(Who did I talk to? I can't remember who I talked to--who was my buddy in the museum at that time?) And I said [to whoever it was], "My God, he's going to have a rough time because Edith will run the place. He's the museum director, but who's she?"

Benedetti: Well, I think—at least the title they gave them was--Patrick was the Administrative Director and she was the Program Director.

Browse: But you know, you could see that he really couldn't express himself very, very much the first year. It was really Edith's joint. It was her museum.

Benedetti: But he was supposed to be basically in charge of the budget—and all the administrative matters.

Browse: And he was supposed to kind of develop—actually I think that was the time when they first started getting people in as fundraisers.

Benedetti: Well--

Browse: Was it—or later? We had two or three fundraisers.

Benedetti: Yes. The first one that I knew about was Mark Gallon, who was, I think, working for Tosco for Mort Winston.

Browse: Yes, yes. Tosco, which was a touch of--

Benedetti: Was there someone before that that you know of?

Browse: No, but I think he was friendly with Frank—like an incestuous—it was part of the family.

Benedetti: Yeah, he got us started on those annual fundraising dinners.

Browse: Yes. **[1:45:00]**

Benedetti: But before you left, there were several people that were hired. Patrick, of course, was—I think he was the first of the strictly museum staff.

Browse: Yes, and who else?

Benedetti: Was—I'm not sure if Karen--

Browse: Copeland.

Benedetti: Copeland--

Browse: Copeland—she was the registrar.

Benedetti: She was the registrar.

Browse: She had some background, didn't she?

Benedetti: Well, yes, I think she had worked at a museum back east. And Marcie [Page], I think Marcie may have started as a volunteer to begin with.

Browse: A volunteer—she was a volunteer.

Benedetti: And then she became an assistant registrar to Karen.

Browse: To Karen, yes. And now she's big noises--

Benedetti: Well, at Pacific Asia, yeah, now--

Browse: Especially with some of the goings-on there.

Benedetti: But she--

Browse: But she learned through--

Benedetti: Yes, yes.

Browse: Yes, Marcie was there, yes. Then there was Shan--

Benedetti: Well, she came later, a little bit later. She and Willow Young both came a little bit later.

Browse: Yes, and then there was the education girl.

Benedetti: Well Karen became the educator. Yeah, she was the first educator. What happened was that Karen was the registrar and Marcie was her assistant. But Karen really wanted to do the education. So a couple of years into it, she was—I guess the Museum at that point was able to afford a little more to hire Marcie as the registrar and Karen became the educator.

Browse: But who was the other girl—the tall, dark girl?

Benedetti: Well Janet Marcus--

Browse: Janet Marcus.

Benedetti: two years later--. She was--

Browse: But she was really very, very, very good.

Benedetti: Oh very, yes, yes.

Browse: Excellent.

Benedetti: She stayed, I think, at least eight years or more.

Browse: Her husband became my doctor.

Benedetti: Oh did he? Dr. Bob [laughing]!

Browse: Although he was a specialist. He was my just general practitioner.

Benedetti: Were--

Browse: Edith came up with these ideas for her P.E.T. Project—Preservation of Ethnic Traditions.

Benedetti: Oh yes. That's all at UCLA now. [That is, the P.E.T. files.]

Browse: Yes and she [Edith] came up with the idea of some form of trunk shows that she wanted to be able to send to education departments, out to schools in the form of a trunk that the teacher could just—it would be there. And all of these things were so extraordinary! And I always said, you know, we're never going to have the space to be a collecting museum. We really should be an educational museum because some of the things that they did were so good.

Benedetti: Yes.

Browse: And what do you have to have collections for?

Benedetti: Yes, well that was a controversy all along. But I—I'd like to know if you were involved or had heard any of that controversy at the beginning.

Browse: No—I spoke to Edith, I just said--remember saying—you know, our education department is our strength. And we should send that out and count on that for everything. Because other than that—I said, "As the years pass," I said, "people still refer to this place as The Egg and The Eye—and Edith choked—she choked!

Benedetti: Yes, yes. [Pause.] Maybe you have an insight about this. I know that they, at the beginning of the ideas of about having a new museum—the Museum Tower and all of that—the Ratkovich development—I know that they--at the beginning of the plans for that--a restaurant was supposed to be included.

Browse: Uh-huh.

Benedetti: But when they finally—[when] that was abandoned, that plan was abandoned, and they hired the architects Hodgetts & Fung and instead did this more modest, but still very practical, plan of joining the corner building with the original building, somehow or other, the restaurant was not included in that plan. And I know that a lot of the staff that were around when the Museum reopened in 1995 were quite surprised, really, at how much of a difference that made! Because we had heard **[1:50:00]**—and I think that Edith may have said this—that because of the restaurant (even though the restaurant was popular), we were not taken seriously—because of the restaurant. And that somehow—now I don't know—was that Patrick's idea or who--?

Browse: I have no idea because so many of the major museums have a restaurant!

Benedetti: Oh yes, yes!

Browse: And some of them are so good!

Benedetti: Oh, absolutely! You can literally spend a whole day at a museum because you can always stop and--

Browse: --and eat. I don't know when that--

Benedetti: Because—I think that none of us realized [what a difference it would make] until we had to live without the restaurant--

Browse: It was a dead end.

Benedetti: It wasn't just that people were not coming in because of the restaurant. It was the ambience, the—it was really an organic feeling about having the restaurant as part of the whole picture. And I always wondered why--

Browse: *Why*--

Benedetti: --why somebody on the board didn't push a little bit harder to have that happen.

Browse: I don't know. I don't know.

Benedetti: And I did hear this thought that was expressed more than once that the restaurant, you know, that we didn't get enough respect with the restaurant there.

Browse: The space was still there.

Benedetti: Yes—although eventually they had to take it over for office space because--

Browse: Yes, but I mean it was originally in the first revamp I think it was still there.

Benedetti: Yeah, I guess they did still have some hope of it but--

Browse: I don't know. It might have been Edith. I don't know. I mean I know that she hated reference [of it] after all those years.

Benedetti: [She thought] that people should know that it's a museum.

Browse: But it used to be The Egg and The Eye.

Benedetti: Yes.

Browse: It's sad isn't it?

Benedetti: Yes. Well--

Browse: I have no idea whether Pat—I mean, yes, because it didn't have good parking, I mean--

Benedetti: Well, that was a whole other disaster. I mean the parking. It wasn't very good, but there was at least room for—I don't know—eight or ten cars in the space between those two buildings.

Browse: But with the restaurant it would have been difficult. Maybe you have to have more. I don't know.

Benedetti: Oh, well that's possible, that there may have been some zoning restrictions, I suppose.

Browse: That might have been.

Benedetti: They got away with a lot before they were a museum.

Browse: Maybe that was one of the problems.

Benedetti: Maybe so.

Browse: Because I mean if a restaurant has so many tables, you've got to account for so many cars.

Benedetti: I think that could very well be.

Browse: That might be. Sad.

Benedetti: I'm just looking at my little notes to myself and I realize I didn't ask you—who was it that did the publicity during The Egg and The Eye days? There wasn't really a publicist as such was there? But yet it seemed like you got plenty of publicity.

Browse: We got so much publicity. We were *liked*.

Benedetti: But how did people—was it just word of mouth?

Browse: No, because we—there was a magazine in the *L.A. Times* called "The Home Section."

Benedetti: Oh yes.

Browse: It was a magazine and it came out every week, four times a month. We had a show every month. If we weren't mentioned at least twice out of those four months—four weeks—we were absolutely incensed!

Benedetti: So was there somebody on the staff--?

Browse: People—no—they came, they came to us. There was always somebody who knew there was a story at—we didn't send invitations or anything—no—we just opened it up [the *L.A. Times Home Magazine*] the first thing in the morning [on Sunday and if there was a CAFAM-related story—which there usually was]—ah-h-h good! That means we're great for the next couple of weeks.

Benedetti: You mean you didn't send out press releases?

Browse: I wasn't there more than a couple of weeks and Edith said—I had had an interest in Africa in flowers and horticulture, besides my optical business—and a farm—I had a flower shop. [1:55:00]

Benedetti: You did! In Nairobi?

Browse: Yes. [Flower shops are] run by women in England and here many men run floral shops, but in England, it's a female profession and my cousins had a hotel, which they rebuilt, and the girl, who I knew very well, in the florist's department, moved out into a doctors' building. And I said to her, "Are you going to move back?" and she said, "No, I'm very happy where I am in the doctors' building. So I said to a friend of mine, "She's not going back." And he said, "Shall we open a flower shop? We'll have somebody run it for us." So I was into flowers. Oh, I can't tell you how many things I've done! So, anyhow, Edith said, "We'll do a show: "Plants and Their Containers."

Benedetti: Oh, I've seen the announcement for that, yes.

Browse: Because she had a friend who used to make ceramics and then she used to plant the plant in the—it was organically involved into the plant—so it looked like the one grew out of the other. This woman used to do kind of dance therapy. I've forgotten what her name was—I'll remember. So she said—she always liked to help her—and we had her little pots in the shop: "We'll do a show." So she said, "You do it!" I hadn't been there a week, months. So I said, "Edith I don't know anybody." "Do it!" [Unintelligible] So just my luck, the following week in the Home Section [of the *L.A. Times*], there was a wonderful article about somebody's patio. And it sounded so wonderful and they had this man's name. So I phoned up the *L.A. Times* and said, "You've got an article. . . . Who is this person?" And they gave me the name. And I said, "Can you give me his phone number?" And I called him up and said, "Do you know The Egg and The Eye?" And he said, "Yes," and I said, "Would you come for lunch? I have a proposition." I said "I've been asked to do a show and I don't know even one nursery in the town. I've only just arrived here. Can you help me? You seem to know—" He said, "I've got just the right people." They had [just had] the earthquake [the Sylmar Earthquake, February 9, 1971] and there were these people in the Valley who had been pushed out and they were living in Sylmar with all their plants. So I was introduced to them.

Benedetti: That was in '71 [when the Sylmar 6.6 magnitude earthquake struck] I think. Yes.

Browse: And I was introduced to them. And they came down and they said yes, they would be [gratified] because they needed the PR. So the idea was to have plants and their containers. What a show! ["Plants and Their Containers," June 6 – July 2, 1972.] We'd just got the little house [the "cottage" at 731 S. Curson]. So we used the courtyard [the

cottage had a lanai] for all of the stock. And we turned that museum (or rather the gallery) into a botanical garden! It was so extraordinarily beautiful. And I [unintelligible] Edith. I went out looking for containers. I found a porcelain service, a French little porcelain stove, and I said, "Can I borrow it? Can I take it on consignment?"—from an antique shop. And they said yes. So I put it in and took off the top and I put ferns growing out of it. Edith hit the ceiling!

Benedetti: She didn't like it?

Browse: No! "You don't use objects for props!" . . . Yes. I mean she was really—she loved the show, but that was the only other time anybody stood against her. She wanted to [do the] display [of] the plants. And they said, "No." And they threatened to walk out of the show on opening day.

Benedetti: Now, these were the people that you had gotten to help you.

Browse: Yes. Phil Cook and Bob Cole. They had this nursery and they promised to bring in all the plants and I would maintain them for the month.

Benedetti: I was wondering who was watering the plants!

Browse: I was and we ruined the carpet.

Benedetti: Oh God.

Browse: We had to take up the carpet. I had to do all the watering. Some of it was very rare and you don't have to put money—but it was extraordinary! I mean it looked like Kew Gardens inside. And they said, "No," they wouldn't allow her to do it. [Unintelligible] And they threatened to walk—pull the whole show out on Tuesday morning for the opening night.

Benedetti: So the--

Browse: We had ceramics for containers. You know the architectural people, Edith's great friends?

Benedetti: Rita Lawrence. [Her company was Architectural Pottery.]

Browse: Yes, they had pots in it. And then we had other people who had pots that you could use. And we planted some. But she didn't like the idea of something that's not related to a pot—like a stove--being used as a [prop].

Benedetti: Oh, I see, OK

Browse: Can you *believe*--?

Benedetti: But what was the controversy between the people who were helping to produce--?

[2:00:00]

Browse: Because they wanted to do the full display themselves.

Benedetti: Oh.

Browse: It was their profession.

Benedetti: Yes--

Browse: And Edith always wanted to do all the displays. That was the only other time she ever blew up completely! And they threatened to walk out.

Benedetti: So—they won.

Browse: They won. She had to admit it was wonderful. But it [the situation] was a *nightmare*!

Benedetti: Oh my goodness! You had to—you were sort of in the middle of all that.

Browse: Yes. It was *my* show. It wasn't her show. She had said, "It's *your* show." She was really very, very funny. But the other time she and I really blew up was in—she went away—she allowed me once or twice to display and it was contemporary craft and I thought it would be nice to make vignettes. Not just have everything looking like a gallery. Let's, perhaps, group things [so] that people would see what it looked like in the house. So I kind of made a corner with a lamp and I draped a scarf and put something on it. It just looked very pretty, like you'd see in a magazine. Edith walked in and she hit the ceiling! I said, "What's wrong with it?" She said, "This textile is a textile. It has worth. It's a piece of art. And this pot has its worth. You don't use one to prop up the other. And I'd done a lot of the display this way. Just to try something different.

Benedetti: Yes.

Browse: So everything had to be changed at the last minute!

Benedetti: So she had her art gallery in mind.

Browse: I understood her after that. She said, "Why would you kind of use this beautiful weaving as a prop, as a piece of background?" She said, "Basically, it should be pinned up; it's so beautiful, you know, or smoothed out and folded perfectly. But you don't use it as background for anybody else." So I learned that and it became part of all the display I ever did after that when I helped in the shop. Every piece had to have its value.

Benedetti: Yes.

Browse: Which was interesting.

Benedetti: Yes! Absolutely. Well, I think we want to begin to wind up, but I wanted to just ask you, so we finish this sort of phase—and then tomorrow we're going to talk about the second phase of your relationship--

Browse: I can't think if there's anything left! [Both laughing]

Benedetti: Well you—we have [already] talked a little bit about the second phase but—I just wanted to ask you about—I believe that you were partly responsible for Ann Robbins coming in to take over. You at this point were the Shop Manager in the museum and you had decided to leave. So—what happened then?

Browse: Well, it was all so interesting, when I was told to employ Ann. [Before I interviewed Ann for the job, Edith said she must be given the job.] I was given the chance—I was in charge of hiring and firing and you can't believe how many people came to us looking for jobs with bachelors' and masters' and PhDs. . . in those days! Really qualified people, just wanting a job, it was terrible! And then Ann was told [by a friend of a friend that we would give her] this job.

Benedetti: There was a recession going on—I remember that.

Browse: So Ann comes and she's very, very nice and she sits down and we talk, and I think—oh, she's charming. So I said, "Have you got any children?" Of course, you're not supposed to ask that today, but in those days you could. And, "Yes," she said, she had three. And how young is the youngest one? He was a little--four or five or something--doll. So I said, "Well, he's just at school--what happens if you get a call from school?" Should I walk out [unintelligible] What happens to--? She said, "I don't care. I get a call from the school I walk out. I leave." Of course, you can't [ask these kinds of questions now]—this is long ago.

Benedetti: Right. So it was brave of her to say that.

Browse: And I thought, "Oh my God, how am I going to cover this if she's got the child sick from whooping cough for a week. How do we—you know. It was so much [unintelligible], so much terror. So I said, "Well, all right." And I gave her the job and she was wonderful. And she knew an awful lot about crafts and--

Benedetti: She was an artist herself I think.

Browse: And so when people came for bringing stuff in, it became more her job than mine
[2:05:00] to interview people—and they'd bring her—everyday we'd have appointments with people with slides and box loads of their crafts or jewelry or ceramics--

Benedetti: So you hired her as your assistant to begin with?

Browse: More or less, yes, yes, yes. It wasn't a title; she was just—Ann was there.

Benedetti: But you were both working at the same time.

Browse: Working together, yes. So she did more and more of this dealing with the--

Benedetti: --with the artists--

Browse: --the artists. Which was wonderful.

Benedetti: Was she a ceramicist?

Browse: She was, yes. And so we worked very, very well together. And then she had her problem--

Benedetti: I didn't know—she had a heart problem?

Browse: No, she had a--

Benedetti: Oh, a cancer.

Browse: A mastectomy. I remember, just before Christmas one day, she was standing there. And I said, "What are you doing?" And she said, "Oh, nothing." And then later I watched. I said, "Ann, what are you doing?" She said, "I found a lump today."

Benedetti: When was this?

Browse: I don't remember, but it was in the middle of our time together.

Benedetti: Oh, I didn't know that.

Browse: And I said, "You go and see the doctor tomorrow." "No, no I'll see Christmas through." I said, "You're not coming back tomorrow." And that was—she had that surgery and she got through that. And then she came back OK. But it was a terrible time for us. And then when it was time for me to go, I said, "I'm going to recommend that you are the Manager. But don't take the job,"--I think I mentioned this to you—I said, "Don't take the job when they offer it to you. Say you will on one condition and that is if they make the shop accounts separate from the museum and the CAFAM shop is a separate bill—everything banked separate." I said, "You can't just have it just going into the [general operating fund]." "

Benedetti: And she did do that.

Browse: She did do that. I said, "Don't take it and they'll give in because there is nobody else. And you're doing a good job and I'm going to highly recommend you, but don't take it—." And they gave in. For a while I think it worked. I think for a while her accounts were paid, you know, the artists and things for a while I think were paid first and foremost. But then it fell into the same terrible financial pit—I mean it was awful.

Benedetti: Yes. And I think the shop actually did pay for a good deal of the museum costs too--

Browse: Oh yes. I mean the idea was that we would pay our own artists first. You know, the ones that—whose works we bought or the first consignments--

Benedetti: They [the artists] trusted you.

Browse: Of *course* they trusted us and then—we used to get things from artists and say, “We’ll buy two pieces, or three pieces, but could you consign a couple of the good ones?” And they’d say, “Yes.” You know, so they got a little cash up front, and then they’d see the big piece sold and they’d want the money at the end of the month. 30 days.

Benedetti: Yeah. That must have been very hard.

Browse: I think there was a contract that they would be paid within 30 days. It was terrible. So she then, when she left, she handed it over to Carol [De Runtz Day].

Benedetti: Now when was Susan Skinner hired?

Browse: Susan Skinner was at the very, very beginning--before the museum--at The Egg and The Eye. [Actually Susan was hired by Ann Robbins in March 1976, after John left.]

Benedetti: So Ann worked with you for a while, and then you left, and Ann was the Shop Manager--

Browse: Did she bring Susan in?

Benedetti: I thought that she brought Susan in.

Browse: And then when I came back [August 31, 1982], Susan thought that she was going to be the manager.

Benedetti: Oh-h-h.

Browse: And she was pissed off!

Benedetti: I think I remember that.

Browse: And she was very, very difficult. And she made up her mind to open her own store. [Susan stayed on as Associate Shop Manager for 19 more months, resigning in March 1984.]

Benedetti: Yes. That’s when she—with some partners—started The New Stone Age, I think.

Browse: Uh-huh.

Benedetti: Well, we’re going to get into all that tomorrow! [Both laughing]

Browse: Good.

End of Session 1 [2:09:41].

CRAFT AND FOLK ART MUSEUM ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW OF JOHN BROWSE

Session 2, Tuesday, April 1, 2008. Interviewed by Joan M. Benedetti (1 hour, 34 minutes, 44 seconds).

Benedetti: Today is Tuesday, April 1, 2008, and I'm once again here with John Browse in his apartment in Los Angeles. John was associated with the Craft and Folk Art Museum during two important periods of time. First, beginning in November 1971, when CAFAM was still The Egg and The Eye Gallery and ending in [March] 1976, almost a year after the transformation to a museum. So that's what we mostly talked about yesterday. And this morning we're going to focus on a second period of time in the 80s when he was asked to again take on the job of Shop Manager. So John, you told me that this came about because Ann Robbins, who had taken over as Shop Manager when you left in 1976—I guess rather suddenly—decided to leave. I think she just wanted to be at home with her family more.

Browse: I think so, yes.

Benedetti: And so that was in August 1982, and you were very happily working on your import business, right? And you received a frantic call. So—take the story from there.

Browse: Well, I was busy in my garage, working on a shipment, literally up to my knees in shredded paper, and I got this call, would I please kind of come down and talk to them? And I said, "Well, what's it about?" "We have to see you." And I said, "Well, I can't today. I'm busy packing." And they said, "No, please come. It's very urgent."

Benedetti: Do you remember who called you?

Browse: You know, I don't remember.

Benedetti: OK.

Browse: I think it was Edith or Ann, one of them. But it was such a—I had to change trousers and dash down to the museum. And they were sitting in Edith's office: Patrick, Ann, and Edith. And they said that she was leaving and that—would I come back to run the Shop? And it was out of the blue—I mean, I had no idea why or what. I sensed that Ann wanted to leave and the next in line would have been Susan Skinner . . . She was always up and down. And I don't think they felt that she was, you know, the appropriate person, and so they asked me, would I please come back. And I was trying to think last night—I couldn't have gone back on a full-time basis. I was lying in bed thinking, I must have said, 5 days or 4 days a week. Because I used to be working seven days when I first joined The Egg and The Eye. And I have a feeling I said four days a week, and that I

would have to have time off for the gift shows, which would constitute my vacation time. Because I had to do the Los Angeles, San Francisco gift shows.

Benedetti: To show *your*--

Browse: My own merchandise, yes.

Benedetti: Yes, yes.

Browse: So, they agreed. I have no idea—the salaries were so low then.

Benedetti: Yes, it's unbelievable, when--

Browse: It's unbelievable when you think—so they agreed, and I went back to work. And I was thinking back that Ann had developed the Shop very, very well. With her knowledge of contemporary crafts, Edith had kind of kept her hand on the folk art aspect, and it seemed to be doing reasonably well. There had been some interesting shows. Financially, I think they were still in a mess, but I agreed to go back. It also meant that I would kind of have to take over some of Ann's responsibilities with contemporary craftsmen, which I hadn't really dealt an awful lot with. We had people who made appointments, oh, three, four times a week to bring their slides. To begin with, they used to bring their merchandise, their objects, and then we said, no, we wouldn't ever accept anything unless it was slides before we actually called them in. And we gave them an hour or two. I mean [we were] very, very kind--

Benedetti: O-o-h, that's a lot!

Browse: Sometimes [we] had to say no. It was very difficult, but sometimes one was able to—having been on my own and entering and selling in craft fairs and folk art fairs, Los Angeles gift show—I knew what the market was like. And it was a change in marketing that was coming forward—not just the wonder of something new--

Benedetti: So you had changed [5:00] in those six years also.

Browse: Oh, yes, yes, uh-huh. The whole world had changed. I mean, it wasn't--

Benedetti: But you were much more knowledgeable about how to--

Browse: Knowledgeable, yes, and the other thing is that the gift show still had young people coming in from other cultures, other countries, having traveled the world and bringing in some really interesting things. Stuff we had seen before, but was vanishing. And I was able to go to the gift shows, set up my booth, and then run around the show before any of the buyers came and stick CAFAM labels on all the one-of-a-kind.

Benedetti: So you were doing both!

Browse: And people got furious. They didn't know how the Craft and Folk Art—they didn't know I had gone back to work.

Benedetti: Oh-h-h.

Browse: Neither did the other exhibitors. They didn't know I was doing two jobs.

Benedetti: You didn't have time to introduce yourself.

Browse: No, I didn't want to. I just said [unintelligible]. So I used to go around the day before the show and I used to stick on our little yellow labels on everything that was one of a kind and so we, during the first few years I took over, we had kind of an "in." Every good piece of folk art ended up at the Craft and Folk Art Museum.

Benedetti: Now it sounds as if you had a little more money to play with at that time.

Browse: Well, no, we just—I always said to Frank, "If you have to make ten thousand dollars, you've got to give me five thousand dollars." I mean it was—you double the price. And that wasn't enough. But that was the basic structure of buying wholesale and selling retail.

Benedetti: Yeah.

Browse: So I said if we want to make a few set projects that we're going to make fifty thousand dollars in the Shop, I have to have twenty-five thousand to spend. You know, I mean, he didn't look at it that way, and he realized that we just had to do it.

Benedetti: So you really—maybe it was a little bit easier as far as the cash flow--

Browse: Well, it was easier to go round and get these things and most of the stuff sold immediately because it was one of a kind and we had it. But, of course, once we banked the checks, it went to pay the lights, the water, and the salaries.

Benedetti: So that was the same old thing.

Browse: And we had the same old thing. When the following year came round and I kind of stuck our name on all of these one of a kind, people were very angry. They said, you know, we want payment.

Benedetti: Hmm-m-m.

Browse: So I used to have to tell the accountant which accounts we must pay to insure that we get the very best of folk art. And we got extraordinary stuff. I mean, really wonderful.

Benedetti: Now the gift show that you were—that you had a booth for—was that exclusively folk art or tribal art or-- ?

Browse: It was everything. No it was everything.

Benedetti: So you were able to do some buying for—of contemporary craft there?

Browse: Yes, oh yes. And not only there, but it wasn't as much there as the ACC [the American Craft Council] had developed—and they had annual shows in New York and San Francisco, the first show in Minneapolis, their very first—I went to that.

Benedetti: I think that Ann was actually involved in helping to organize those on the west coast.

Browse: Uh-huh. And we followed on. And, actually, how we found the money to fly into these places, pay hotels for two or three days' stay, and purchase stuff--?

Benedetti: Well, I had the impression that Edith was wanting to impress the American Craft Council--

Browse: Very much so.

Benedetti: --and probably, you know, pushed a little bit to make that happen.

Browse: Well, the thing of it was, the *Craft* and Folk Art Museum. A lot of people wanted it to be the CC—the Contemporary Craft and Folk Art Museum. They thought crafts could be tribal crafts and not—tribal crafts and folk art, but not *contemporary* crafts. And so she did try very hard, and, I mean, knowing how the marketing had changed and fine contemporary crafts were being very expensive. I mean artists were making no money, so if they sold a unique piece, they put an enormous price on it.

Benedetti: Yes.

Browse: Almost something, well, this'll last me for six months. You know we're charging hundreds and thousands of dollars.

Benedetti: Well, now it's—astro--

Browse: Astronomical. So we couldn't do that, so I thought in marketing we would use functional crafts, things like teapots that worked, place settings, condiment sets, beautifully designed. And they sold. So we used to have repeat orders of those.

Benedetti: So you had none--or just less--of the nonfunctional crafts?

Browse: No, it was mixed. You know we always like to see real artistic craft. **[10:00]**

Benedetti: Right.

Browse: And with those we used to buy two or three pieces and then say to the artist, would they please consign for a month two big pieces, and when we'd get them into the store, we will do a little miniature show. We isolated it--

Benedetti: Oh yes, you used to call those "mini-shows."

Browse: Yes, we used to kind of isolate it within the shop to give it a presence so you could actually look at it. And we influenced it as an artist and--

Benedetti: When did those mini-shows start? I mean that was after the museum became a museum.

Browse: Oh yes, it was when I went back.

Benedetti: Oh it was. OK.

Browse: That was the way of getting some of these people. And, for instance, with a traveling show, I always tried to reflect what the museum was having in the Shop. So that people would say, "Oh, you know—"

Benedetti: In the exhibition gallery.

Browse: Yes. For instance, when they had the large "Jewelry USA" [exhibition in 1985]. I didn't know what to do and I said—which is one of the finest jewelry colleges? And they said Rochester in New York. [Rochester Institute of Technology has the School for American Crafts (formerly the School for American Craftsmen) as part of its Fine Arts Program; it offers a B.A. in Fine Arts with a specialization in wood, ceramics, glass, or metals/jewelry.]

Benedetti: Oh yes.

Browse: So I wrote a letter—no telephone calls or anything or e-mails. I wrote to the director, explained who we were, and said the traveling show was coming and did he have any post-graduate students, I'd like to make an exhibition of six or seven of his post-graduate students. And he was thrilled.

Benedetti: Of course.

Browse: But only if we could produce a kind of—not a brochure—even an invitation which listed their names and their resumés--

Benedetti: Sure.

Browse: That was a nightmare to get them to find money just to do one little mail-out.

Benedetti: Oh-h-h.

Browse: But our exhibition stood out. And it was superb work. And a lot of people enjoyed the Shop show more than they did the--

Benedetti: Well, and they could, presumably, buy or potentially buy--

Browse: Oh yes, well everything was for sale.

Benedetti: Yeah, yeah.

Browse: And we did the same when they did "Kentucky Crafts" [in 1987]. I phoned up the Chamber of Commerce in Kentucky and I got the names of weavers and wrote to them and they sent carpets and baskets and things for the Shop to sell. Some of the stuff was as good as what they had in the exhibition!

Benedetti: Yes.

Browse: But ours was for sale.

Benedetti: Well, you know, I do remember that at least part of the time the objects in the exhibition were also, sort of, you know, "under the table," for sale. They--

Browse: Yes--

Benedetti: --I guess because of the tax regulations--

Browse: --being a museum, yes.

Benedetti: Right. And it seems to me, though, that when that happened, was the Shop involved at all?

Browse: Yes, it had to go through the Shop.

Benedetti: So you would have a list that you could let people know about.

Browse: Yes, uh-huh.

Benedetti: Yes, I kind of remember that.

Browse: It was working out—I was marking some of them [on the exhibition list]—we did--I suppose toward the end of my time, it became more important that we reflected what was going into the museum and try to build up the sales in the Shop. I think the restaurant was going down at that time.

Benedetti: Well, I was going to ask you--when you came back in the 80s—I don't think Ian Barrington was there right away. There was still some other—wasn't there some other [restaurant manager]?

Browse: Yes, there was somebody else. But he took over almost when I came back.

Benedetti: Oh really. That's what I was wondering. So you think maybe in--

Browse: But it was also the time—I don't know the exact date—when the Health Department said that eggs were anathema.

Benedetti: Oh right.

Browse: And nobody wanted to come and have omelettes. It was really very, very frightening.

Benedetti: So it was—it did affect the customers?

Browse: Oh definitely. I mean we sold—people came in and we had salads and soups and a cheese—I asked Claire [Oksner, who worked in the shop in the early 70s] last night, I said, “Didn’t we have a cheese plate?” She said, “Yes, I think we even had a sausage plate!”—you know, with cold meats. But down the road there was this—opposite the County Museum—this beautiful restaurant opened called the Garden [the Greenhouse]—right opposite [LACMA].

Benedetti: Oh, yes, yes!

Browse: --and that took away everybody! It was beautiful and big and sumptuous and it did affect us.

Benedetti: I hadn’t thought about it. I remember going there with the [LACMA librarian].

Browse: Yes, yes, it was really beautiful, and I think, you know, we used to have people having to wait in the Shop to get a seat in the restaurant—even though they had bookings. I don’t think we ended up like that. **[15:00]** You could almost [always] get a seat when you came for lunch toward the end.

Benedetti: But, well, when The Egg and The Eye started, of course, there really wasn’t any competition--

Browse: There was nothing—nothing at all.

Benedetti: But gradually there were more—but still, even in the 80s the--

Browse: There was nothing in the area.

Benedetti: And it was a special place, I think, The Egg and The Eye restaurant—as well as the museum. It was special enough that people would kind of plan a day. I remember that some of us—and Edith I know—were kind of exasperated because they knew that people were going to LACMA to look at the shows at LACMA and they would come to The Egg and The Eye restaurant to have lunch and wouldn’t necessarily even notice that we had a gallery or--

Browse: No, because if once you’ve done one exhibition down there [at LACMA], you’re exhausted. You know, I mean you only have feet for so many, you know, for so much walking.

Benedetti: Yes.

Browse: And the shows, looking on as they developed, we had some really awful shows.

Benedetti: Really? [Both laughing] Well tell us about those! Which ones did you think--

Browse: I don't know. I'm trying to think when we—where did we have—when did I come back?

Benedetti: '82. But I don't think I have the names of [all of] the shows there. [John is looking at the timeline.] You'd have to look at the chronological [list of exhibitions].

Browse: The Festival of Masks, of course, was such an extraordinary development--

Benedetti: Oh that was something else I wanted to ask you about because when you left [the first time], whenever it was, in '76—in [March] of '76 I think, they hadn't even started [the Festival of Masks]. There was a parade, which was the first thing--

Browse: No. A parade—worked through schools.

Benedetti: Yes, [there were classes] in September.

Browse: Yes, the education department or something? Or City or--?

Benedetti: Well, I think it was just Edith's idea in September [October] of '76 to have this parade [at the end of October]. She got some people from CalArts to come and, you know, that was when the police almost arrested them [the CalArts Gamelan orchestra] because they were sitting on the sidewalk out in front. But at any rate, that was the start of it. That was a few months after you had left and it wasn't even a Festival then, it was just the parade.

Browse: Just the parade, yes.

Benedetti: And it was the next year that the Festival began.

Browse: And they had all the booths and the music in Hancock Park, yes.

Benedetti: Right, right. But then by the time you came back in '82 it was huge! Many more booths and they'd even added this Masquerade Ball on Friday night. So it was really a three-day affair.

Browse: Yes, yes--and the idea was a fundraiser, I mean, to make money for—I don't think they ever--

Benedetti: I was going to say—I never—I don't think they ever made any money.

Browse: Yes, because they had to—they rented the booths and the food concessions—I think it was Pepsi-Cola one year and then Coke the next year, which they thought would make money, but there was the police we had to cover, traffic control—I mean the street was closed down.

Benedetti: For the parade, yes.

Browse: For the parade.

Benedetti: There were a lot of expenses. But what did you think about it all? Do you remember going to the Festival for the first time?

Browse: Yes. I remember coming back and there was so much activity because in the time I'd been away the education department was in full swing. They had storytelling. They had paper cutouts, all sorts of things on Sunday for children. They had, I think, even musical workshops or something with drums and things.

Benedetti: Probably.

Browse: Then the [planning for the] last Festival of Masks wasn't just a couple of weeks. It was almost a year-long preparation.

Benedetti: At the—yes, yes.

Browse: So that was something ongoing. There was a department that was ongoing. There was the auction for one or two years.

Benedetti: Yes, well, there was a contemporary craft—or rather contemporary mask—silent auction that I think that Shan Emanuelli put together.

Browse: Yes, yes. I mean there were so many fragmented—I wasn't there when--

Benedetti: There were a lot of things going on.

Browse: Too many. When they were offered the place in the Santa Monica [shopping mall-- Santa Monica Place] I was not there. Ann took it over and she called me to look at it and [it was] at the end of the upstairs at the end of a corridor.

Benedetti: The location was no good.

Browse: I said, "This is terrible." And they didn't make a penny out of that.

Benedetti: They had some wonderful shows there. But it was not a [financial] success and they closed in a year. They were there for a year.

Browse: And it meant extra staff. I don't know if we used to call it "Edith's Folly," [20:00] but she had a lot of follies and the idea of being invited to this extraordinary new shopping center-

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Benedetti:--designed by Frank Gehry.

Browse: Designed by Frank Gehry no less—it's one of his worst designs.

Benedetti: Yes, but one of his, you know, early ones when he was first getting noticed.

Browse: Yes, I mean everybody talked about it, but we just spent too much time on too many ideas I think.

Benedetti: We were really stretched.

Browse: Very stretched, yes.

Benedetti: And everybody had to get into the act. I mean, I was going to ask you—I mean, you were the Shop Manager so presumably you were in the Shop most of the time, but some of this activity must have kind of spilled over and--

Browse: Well, I realized—I was lying in bed last night thinking—when I went back I had a job to do, which was to manage the Shop and one of the . . . things I did was to give the volunteer problem to Carol [DeRuntz Day].

Benedetti: You hired Carol.

Browse: She was there. I think she was there.

Benedetti: Oh, she was already there? Ann had hired her?

Browse: Yes, and she was very sweet, young, very young, and very pretty. And quite flighty. And I said to her, "Would you like a job?" And she'd worked with Ann with the contemporary craft people coming in. She kind of stood by her and was learning that. So I said to her, "Since I've come back and we do look at new crafts brought in by artists, we'll do this together." I thought, I can't just cut her out. And I don't know as much as she's been learning through Ann. I knew more the folk art.

Benedetti: That was smart of you.

Browse: So we worked together with that. [In 1984, Susan Skinner, who had been John's Associate Shop Manager, left to start, with a partner, her own gallery/shop, New Stone Age.] And then I said, "I want you to be my assistant manager. You'll have a title. And you're going to be in charge of volunteer coordination."

Benedetti: That's the catch! [Laughing]

Browse: That was the catch.

Benedetti: But she was good at that, wasn't she?

Browse: Yes, except that she had problems with the volunteers. I mean, they were wonderful people, but they didn't feel that loyal. It was a prestige job, you know: "I volunteer at the Craft and Folk Art Museum." It was considered really an honor to be there. We worked together and I suddenly realized that I think I gave her quite a lot of work to do to relieve me. I didn't have to sit with Edith, planning--

Benedetti: You were taking Frank's advice to delegate!

Browse: Yes, and I didn't have to sit with Edith and talk about shows, because that was her and Patrick. Sometimes she passed by me and would say, "What do you think—we're going to do this." She always kept me in the picture. But I wasn't part of [it] like [in] The Egg and The Eye days. So I didn't have that responsibility. I didn't have the volunteer responsibility. I did have to hire and fire people. But my job was really the marketing and that was much easier because I had been out and watched what people were doing. It was a time in which the major department stores started putting contemporary craft in their—near their china and glass.

Benedetti: Oh, yes, yes—that early?

Browse: They were stepping into our very private world.

Benedetti: Yes—so you were beginning to feel more competition.

Browse: We were pressured, yes. And we had to kind of find people. And then certain artists we found in contemporary craft. I'd say, "Where else do you show?" And there was a company called Del Mano—very wonderful—they're still--

Benedetti: They're still—well, although I guess their place of business is in doubt.

Browse: Really?

Benedetti: Well, that whole building [in Brentwood] is, has been sold, I believe.

Browse: But they were in Pasadena too.

Benedetti: Oh I didn't know that!

Browse: They had a beautiful shop in Pasadena.

Benedetti: Oh.

Browse: They were at the top of the form. They were *the* contemporary craft shop. And they didn't want us to have anybody that they had. So there was this fight between artists as to whether—and I spoke to Jan [Peters] and—I've forgotten his name—I said, you know, these are artists. We're not stepping on—we only want them for a certain time. We're not blocking them; they're not part of our "stable" of artists. But we had problems with that. So they were growing up; the department stores were showing contemporary crafts and we had to find stuff that was as good or better. And how do we do that? By going to the contemporary craft shows and offering these people little mini-shows.

Benedetti: Yes, they were more likely, of course, to—were they more likely to give you things on consignment that way?

Browse: It was all on consignment, all on consignment, [25:00] or 90% on consignment. And I mean they were top artists.

Benedetti: Oh yes.

Browse: And I spoke to them. They had a fiber show. I had two basket people and a weaver and I told them we're working with these three people!! "Oh—I'd love to show with them!!"
You know, I mean it was an honor. But we had to pay for the freight both ways because it was consignment. If we bought the stuff they paid for the freight.

Benedetti: I see, uh-huh.

Browse: We used to wiggle and sometimes say, "Well, would you pay for half the freight?" [Sigh]
But we always used to have to pay for the freight going back—what wasn't sold. It became very, very difficult and competition—where in The Egg and The Eye days there was no competition.

Benedetti: Yes, that was sort of a golden period—that earlier period.

Browse: It was a golden period.

Benedetti: So you were buying both folk and contemporary crafts for the Shop. And what about the books? Were you buying the books too?

Browse: I was doing the book buying as well.

Benedetti: I think eventually--

Browse: I don't know who took it over.

Benedetti: Well, eventually I think—but not until maybe '87—Michelle Arens showed up and I think that was one of the things you gave her. Now there were other museum staff that—I know you stayed—well, I should ask you—I think you stayed in touch between the first time and--

Browse: --the second time. Yes I did. I'm looking at some of the exhibitions [at the list of exhibitions]. Yes I used to go to the openings. I, you know, knew the people.

Benedetti: You had been introduced to some of the new people and so on. I was thinking, in particular, about Shan Emanuelli and Willow Young.

Browse: I think I went to their weddings.

Benedetti: Ah-h!

Browse: And I think when they had their babies--who's the education one?

Benedetti: Janet Marcus?

Browse: Janet Marcus. Well, I was very friendly with them because he was my doctor.

Benedetti: Yes.

Browse: . . . And Shan I was quite close with. I went to their house. They had parties that we all went to.

Benedetti: Yes. Yes, there were a lot of parties weren't there? Edith—both Edith and other people. It seemed to me that—any excuse for a party.

Browse: Well, it was really a family in a way. There was a lot of loyalty. People were all frustrated but there was a loyalty to the concepts I think. Even though some of them were pretty flaked out, you know.

Benedetti: Yes, I think we—well, I think everybody that had anything to do with the Craft and Folk Art Museum—I mean there may have been some exceptions—but most everybody just—as soon as they heard about it or saw one of the shows—they were just enamored.

Browse: They were enamored. And yet it was—the membership never grew like it should have grown.

Benedetti: Yeah.

Browse: And I have no idea why, whether the membership fundraising people were not good enough. I have no idea. And it wasn't expensive. [30:00] I don't remember how much membership was, but it wasn't--

Benedetti: No—and admission costs certainly weren't—well, at first it was free for a while. And then I think they charged just two or three dollars for--

Browse: Which is nothing!

Benedetti: No—there was a problem, if you—and I guess you can call it a problem that came up from time to time—and I wonder what you think about it: Just the fact that we did craft—contemporary crafts—all kinds of crafts—and folk art. And there were clearly people who preferred folk art, if not exclusively, at least primarily.

Browse: Well, they had the Folk Art Council.

Benedetti: Well, but they had—and Tomi Kuwayama reminded me of this—Edith started both at the same time—the Contemporary Craft Council, which Shan sort of ushered in, and the Folk Art Council in 1979—at exactly the same time. But the Folk Art Council seemed to really flourish and continue—it never—even during the darkest days when the museum was completely closed—the Folk Art Council continued. The Contemporary Craft Council, although they had some very enthusiastic members--and they had those auctions that I think Mike Kaiser, Shan's husband, you know, was the auctioneer for—still they never had the membership that the Folk Art Council did and I would notice that—this was sort of ironic because you would think that this would cause the Contemporary Craft Council to be bigger: people who were interested in contemporary crafts, who were

mostly the kind of “art crowd”—you know the modern art and contemporary art crowd—they were actually interested in folk art too—not as much—but they had some interest in folk art-- Browse: --but the folk art people--

Benedetti: --but the folk art people had *no* interest in [contemporary crafts].

Browse: No, no interest at all!

Benedetti: Isn't that interesting!

Browse: Yes, but in a way you can see it because all these traditions that went with folk art--the stories, the cultures, the people--were so rich. And then you get the contemporary craft people who were walking around in Birkenstocks--

Benedetti: They were very cool!

Browse: They were very strange people! I have no idea whether it was the fault of the Councils themselves—and then there was a time—I don't know—looking up your timeline if you marked them—whether there wasn't a time in which there was more contemporary craft being shown than folk art?

Benedetti: Well, that's what Tomi—the Folk Art Council, I should say--that their members really felt that after Patrick added design and--

Browse: --and architecture--

Benedetti: --well, design in general to the program, that they [the Folk Art Council] were getting short shrift on the folk art. I did go through the list and I guess there was a time when there was a very slight shift toward design and contemporary crafts. But I remember in staff meetings this was something that we were very aware of in any discussion of the planned exhibitions, they were always thinking of trying to balance--

Browse: --to balance--

Benedetti: --if they had a contemporary craft show and then there was going to be an architecture show, they felt they had to have a folk art show, you know, to try to balance, so it was something they were very aware of.

Browse: I'm just trying to think of the contemporary crafts people, I mean--

Benedetti: There were not very many one-person shows.

Browse: No.

Benedetti: And I think they should have, probably, had more.

Browse: Except there wasn't—other than the great people like Laura Andreson—I mean there wasn't--

Benedetti: Sam Maloof.

Browse: Sam Maloof and the Natzlers. I mean, first of all, their stuff was very expensive, not today, but I mean it was considered expensive [at the time]. June Schwarz [35:00]—do you remember--

Benedetti: Oh yes, she was the enamellist.

Browse: Enamellist—a personal friend of Edith's. Tapestry by Robert Brady. He was a marvelous contemporary weaver.

Benedetti: I think there were three artists—craftspeople—there at the same time with June Schwarz and--

Browse: Yes, but I don't know what it is. When you think of the folk art, I mean, the Kentucky Craft show—it wasn't great but it was interesting. We did it through the--

Benedetti: --the Kentucky State [Tourism Board]--

Browse: There was a Italian show from Friuli--

Benedetti: Oh yes, that was Nathan Shapira's--

Browse: And only because he was a friend of Edith's. And the Sardinian baskets—they weren't strong shows.

Benedetti: No they weren't.

Browse: But they were folk art

Benedetti: Yes.

Browse: I'm trying to think—you know, you go back to the "Palms and Pomegranates," the traditional dress [of Saudi Arabia].

Benedetti: Oh, that was a terrific--

Browse: --really lovely.

Benedetti: But you know, part of that was because the Saudi Arabian embassy people got so involved. They--

Browse: But they came to the opening show and that was it!

Benedetti: Oh.

Browse: The opening night was a glittering affair and I remember it didn't have that much interest.

Benedetti: They did send—there were some craftspeople that came—maybe it was the opening weekend. I know it was during the day—a calligrapher and some other people. So you're saying that after that opening weekend, it kind of faded

Browse: That's what happened—like the Scandinavian shows, the Alvar Aalto shows, and the Finnish shows—the embassy came, but it wasn't a time when people in Los Angeles were really involved in contemporary crafts. It was still considered fairly new here. When you think of the east coast—when you go to east coast shows in New York or Bridgeport or—they have all these little towns that have craft shops. And we only had a few craft shops.

Benedetti: It seems so odd to think now because we have so many.

Browse: And we've got none now.

Benedetti: What do you—or you're speaking of the highest end kind of shops? Of course.

Browse: Well yes, I mean really high-end, where now it's an art and we all admit that it's an art—weaving, basketry, or woodcarving. But we don't have that many galleries dealing with--

Benedetti: There are a few new ones. I was just looking at the current issue of *American Craft*—you know that's what used to be *Craft Horizons*—and there's a section on Los Angeles and it does mention some that I had never heard of—but, you know, they sounded like they might be worth--

Browse: In L.A.? If it is, that's wonderful, but there was a time when there really wasn't but two or three places open—a wonderful ceramic shop on Beverly Blvd. that died. There was a place called Tesoro that was all to do with contemporary craft. They died.

Benedetti: Well, there was the Garth Clark gallery.

Browse: Garth Clark gallery was just down the road from us.

Benedetti: Right.

Browse: It was only a block away. [Garth Clark was next door to CAFAM for several years and then moved to 170 S. La Brea Blvd.] And then we saw a woman—Luna Garcia—her work was--

Benedetti: Oh yes.

Browse: She was at the ACC [the ACE Marketplace] and I bought [her pottery for myself]—I use it here. And I said, "Can we do something for you in the Shop?" And we did a little show for her and she did quite well and then Garth Clark picked her up.

Benedetti: Oh-h-h.

Browse: And later on when I said to her, you know, "Can we have some of your work?" she says, "No, Garth Clark won't let me. I'm in his stable. And he's put the prices up so high I don't sell anything." So there was this very difficult thing among the craftspeople, trying to market themselves, and being out-marketed by galleries-- [Luna Garcia later had her own studio/shop on Main Street in Venice.]

Benedetti: They were torn between the *prestige* of the high-end—or actually selling!

Browse: And it's—I think the last ACC show I went to about five years ago in Baltimore—the work is extraordinary—and I had a friend who showed there and didn't do at all well. By the time you take everything there and pay for your hotel and ship the stuff back to people, they don't make that much money. The top artists are doing well, but the middle-range, [40:00] it's very hard.

Benedetti: Well, of course, from the buyer's perspective, one of the basic attractions of—I don't know if this gets talked about very much—but one of the basic attractions both of folk art and contemporary craft way back when—back in, I suppose, through the sixties anyway—was that it was relatively affordable. You could buy—and of course one of the attractions of the CAFAM Shop was that there were things in it that were original. You know, there may have been similar pieces produced, but each piece was made by hand. It was original and it was relatively affordable—and that changed.

Browse: I think another thing, one of the big magazines, I don't know which, *House Beautiful* or *House and Garden*, just closed a few weeks ago--

Benedetti: Oh-h-h.

Browse: --with the December [issue]—well I think one of the major ones. There was *House Beautiful*, *Home and Gardens*, *Ideal Home*, anyhow--

Benedetti: Yes.

Browse: When you opened those magazines, they were filled with pictures of interiors that either had folk art or contemporary craft as objects of display.

Benedetti: I remember *House Beautiful* especially.

Browse: Today if you look in those magazines, their style— [sigh] They used to have a picture of the kitchen—well you take one now of the kitchen—it looks like an operating room.

Benedetti: Yes.

Browse: In the early days they hung baskets from things--

Benedetti: And plants!

Browse: Yes, and plants. And did we sell baskets! We sold thousands of baskets.

Benedetti: Yes. I don't know if you ever watch HGTV? Some of it is sort of addicting but I'm just flabbergasted to see some of these shows—I don't remember which one—there's one in particular where the host is an artist—I kind of say that with quotes around it—and they're on a budget of course to renovate the whatever it is. And the host will almost always produce some piece of art and it's not necessarily terrible, but I think the message that is sent is that anybody can produce a piece of art.

Browse: Yes, uh-huh.

Benedetti: And, I don't know, I mean, there's something to be said for that point of view I guess, but it really devalues the professional artist.

Browse: Yes, but everything was changing, I mean, in food we've come to this California cuisine where you had a few pieces of food on your plate as an artistic expression. People are used to a plate load of food and--

Benedetti: Everything's an art form now!

Browse: Yes, and the interiors of the magazines changed. And I think people were influenced by that—as they look at fashion magazines. I remember we went through a time, especially when I was doing my business, in which there was no jewelry being worn.

Benedetti: Oh, yes, I hated that! Little, tiny, tiny things--

Browse: Yes, but there was a time with only gold chains and then nothing. That was a time with no jewelry at all.

Benedetti: I remember. I hated that. [Laughing]

Browse: And that's what affects the market.

Benedetti: Yes, of course. People look at—

Browse: The big ethnic jewelry folkloric--

Benedetti: It's coming back, I think.

Browse: It's coming back—but how much—how long a period in the middle when we had all this stuff—nobody bought it.

Benedetti: At least ten or fifteen years.

Browse: And then it died.

Benedetti: Yes, if you can't support the supplier, then--

Browse: I don't know if you've been to New York recently?

Benedetti: Not recently.

Browse: The last time I was there I went to—what's the museum—Modern art--

Benedetti: MoMA [the Museum of Modern Art].

Browse: They had a shop across the road. It used to be so exciting to go into that shop.

Benedetti: Yes.

Browse: I mean everything was just wonderful.

Benedetti: The top of the line.

Browse: Some of the design pieces are the same because it's classic today.

Benedetti: Yes.

Browse: And then you walk around and you don't get inspired anymore.

Benedetti: No—there's a lot of little *chotskes* and just things that are a little too cool--

Browse: I can't help feeling that—they actually brought in somebody didn't they? A marketing person at one time?

Benedetti: You're talking about CAFAM?

Browse: Yes.

Benedetti: Well, there were a couple of marketing surveys.

Browse: Surveys yes. I was out by that time again. But I know they did because they were--

Benedetti: I don't think it got down to [specific kinds of objects]. I have those surveys in the archives. **[45:00]**

Browse: Really?

Benedetti: Yes and it seemed to be primarily in terms of attracting memberships. It didn't get down to giving advice about stuff—**[phone rings; recording paused]**

Browse: I'm trying to think of where things failed. I mean the history of CAFAM from The Egg and The Eye into the development of the museum was the dream of everyone. And then the earthquake stabilization of the building--

Benedetti: Had to move to the May Company.

Browse: That was really a time when maybe they should have forgotten about the whole thing. Then the reconfiguration of the present building--I think was terrible. When I saw the final results.

Benedetti: What was your reaction?

Browse: When you walked into the old door and the Shop immediately--having been interested in [unintelligible] marketing—I found it [the Hodgetts and Fung renovation] just very, very kind of confusing. You walked in and you kind of had some very strange risers and display objects to put things on that didn't really function well. And then the books department, which—all the books had to be spine-out—doesn't help. You have to have face-out for some books.

Benedetti: Um-hmn. Sure.

Browse: We always found that. You had to move books--

Benedetti: You [used to have] the tilted shelves.

Browse: We used to have to move them so that different books could have a time, a breathing space, with their picture on the front. The [former] clothing department, which worked, was just a little rack [in the renovated space]. The whole place was not comfortable. And then you turn to the left where the members' desk was. That [is] wasted space. And the little jewelry counter—and then you [have] to find your way to the elevator. I just it found it very, very confusing.

Benedetti: Hm-hmn.

Browse: Whereas you used to go into the old building and you walked in and there were two galleries—or the Shop and the gallery.

Benedetti: It was immediately apparent.

Browse: You were immediately welcome.

Benedetti: And [it was] pretty clear what was going on.

Browse: Yes. I thought the [renovated] spaces upstairs were very nice.

Benedetti: The top floor gallery—yes that's quite beautiful. And now that they have an elevator, it's actually accessible!

Browse: Accessible.

Benedetti: I don't think that anybody that works there with the elevator could possibly imagine--

Browse: What it was like.

Benedetti: --what it was like. Not just for the customers, but for the people who had to install on the third floor.

Browse: It was a nightmare.

Benedetti: It was amazing. Michelle Arens reminded me of one show where there was some huge--I guess it must have been a wood carving, but it was an enormous thing. They didn't have a crane or anything like that. It was just three or four people pushing and shoving and pulling to get it upstairs. It's quite amazing.

Well, let's see. I wanted—we did talk a little bit about the Festival, but--I was saying that some of that activity that there was so much more of [during the Festival], that it must have impacted on the Shop, but I don't—I'd also like to find out, I mean, you did go to the Festival occasionally, I would guess.

Browse: Yes, in the park [Hancock Park] behind the tar pits. I don't know--the music part people just went mad about. The food was the same as you get at any of these festivals, but people were buying.

Benedetti: But at the time there weren't that many festivals in the seventies and early eighties.

Browse: No, it was a unique experience. And then they did it one year in the Pan Pacific Park, didn't they?

Benedetti: Well, that was [part of] the Olympic [Arts Festival]. You know the Olympics were in L.A. in 1984 and Bob Fitzpatrick, who was the President of CalArts--

Browse: Yes, I remember him.

Benedetti: And was on CAFAM's board and Edith was on their board for a while. I don't know whose idea it was—whether it was Bob Fitzpatrick's idea—at any rate, he was in charge of the arts part of the Olympics. You know they have the Olympic Arts Festival [as part of the Olympic Games]. And he was head of that for L.A. [50:00] And it was quite amazing what he brought in. He brought in artists from all over the world that we had never heard of and were fantastic, and he suggested--or he and Edith suggested--that CAFAM's Festival of Masks could be a central part of [it].

Browse: Well, it was new too wasn't it? I mean the trees really weren't fully grown there--

Benedetti: In Pan Pacific Park?

Browse: It was kind of a new prestigious--

Benedetti: However, there was a problem with that location. It was much bigger, which I guess was good because more people could come, but they decided to charge admission. They had never charged admission before.

Browse: Oh, I didn't realize--

Benedetti: And what that meant was--

Browse: People just didn't--

Benedetti: No, what happened was they had to put up a fence around the whole thing.

Browse: Oh yes, that's right, that's right.

Benedetti: And that cost a huge amount of money. So they ended up not—

Browse: Not making any--

Benedetti: And they also produced—Max King produced—this fabulous catalog for [the concurrent CAFAM mask exhibition that was also the] program for the Festival—and they decided to charge five dollars for it--

Browse: Oh-h-h.

Benedetti: Which, you know, I guess, barely—

Browse: Today it would be nothing.

Benedetti: --didn't even cover the cost of it, but they couldn't get enough people to buy it so—

Well, I guess I was just wondering about your personal reaction to the Festival.

Browse: No it was good, but, you know, the ideas were always bigger than what we could afford. For instance, when we had the Annex. The Annex was not the little corner building; it was above the carpet place. It was a huge space. [The Annex was a leased space occupying the entire second floor of a building on the southeast corner of Wilshire and Curson at 712 S. Curson.]

Benedetti: It was actually a very practical space.

Browse: Wonderful.

Benedetti: It was a little out of the way, but--

Browse: --but people did go. We had the Black Folk Art show there ["Black Folk Art in America: 1930 – 1980," which opened December 7, 1982, and which had been organized by the Corcoran]. Were you here for that?

Benedetti: Oh that was fabulous!

Browse: That was an extraordinary show.

Benedetti: Yes.

Browse: Then they had the very big Sepik River show from the Franklin collection—all the masks from New Guinea.

Benedetti: That was part of that mask show.

Browse: Was that part of the mask show?

Benedetti: That was also in 1984 I believe [concurrent with the Olympic Arts International Festival of Masks].

Browse: I was trying to think of what other shows we had there. But they were all almost bigger than we could cope with in scope.

Benedetti: Yes.

Browse: I don't know how we kind of—had staff over there or volunteers--

Benedetti: Well, that was a time when the staff was expanding and it was welcome space because I remember that certain people for the first time had real offices over there—Janet Marcus and—I was thinking that--it seemed to me I remembered that Ann Robbins started out having an office there and then she left--

Browse: I think she did.

Benedetti: But it seems like it was only a couple of months anyway when she had an office over there

Browse: But I don't remember doing anything in her office there.

Benedetti: No, I don't think so. I think that when she left it was taken over by either the publicist or development.

Browse: We only had it for a short time, really. [The "Annex," which was at 712 S. Curson, opened June 1, 1981 and closed at the end of February 1985.] But everything was expansive.

Benedetti: I think that's a very good point. There was—and I guess [they were] if not Edith's original ideas, [then they were] at least ideas that she pushed and certainly we all felt very stretched. And I would think that it must have affected you in the Shop also. For example, the Councils and then the Associates group that was started, that higher-end group. Those people, I suppose, were additional customers for you, but there were probably--

Browse: But they really weren't. They were just—it was a kind of a group of rich, party people. They went to—I had to go with—you don't know this story?

Benedetti: No.

Browse: They decided to go to India.

Benedetti: Oh.

Browse: On a trip. **[55:00]** I don't know if we had done the Indian folk art show by then or not. ["Indian Folk and Tribal Art," November 25 – December 14, 1975." The Associates went

to India February 4 – 21, 1980.] But Edith had made arrangements and worked out with the folkloric people in India that--

Benedetti: Oh, Haku Shah. [Haku Shah was the Director of the Tribal Museum in Ahmadabad, India; he visited CAFAM during the "Indian Folk and Tribal Art" exhibition.]

Browse: Haku Shah—that we would have a group of 14-15 people—and it was to only go to centers of craft, the dyeing and weaving, the papier maché--

Benedetti: And were you going on that?

Browse: Edith—I don't know if I was with the museum at that time or whether I had left it. I really can't remember. We could probably find it out. [John was not on staff at the time of the tour.] But Edith called me and she said she wanted me to go with her to help her do it. And I said, "Well, I don't know if I can afford it, Edith." "Well, go and speak to Frank."

Benedetti: [laughing] Couldn't she speak to Frank?

Browse: So I went all the way down to Frank's office [in El Segundo].

Benedetti: She thought you could talk to him better--

Browse: And Frank said, "Yes, it would be very nice if you could help Edith on this trip." And I kind of agreed to it. And then I was called back to his office later to sign a paper that he was loaning me the amount of money to pay for the air fares and my share of the trip *plus interest!*

Benedetti: Oh, my God!

Browse: It was so many months, when I came back, at so much a month to pay him back.

Benedetti: Did he think you were going to sell things while you were over there? Why did he think--

Browse: No it was just to help. Edith wanted me there and he thought I wanted to go but I didn't have any money, so he was going to loan it to me. I thought that I was going to help Edith as part of a paid--

Benedetti: Well of course!

Browse: So anyhow, it sounded exciting.

Benedetti: Yeah.

Browse: And I said, "OK." So tickets were arranged by, I think it was Patrick's friend, there was a Chinese guy--

Benedetti: Oh yes, I don't remember his name [Paul Moore], but yes.

Browse: It was 14 people, one guy [and] myself, and 13 or 14 ladies. And we get to the airport and we fly into Hong Kong--

Benedetti: So you did go!

Browse: Yes, and we arrived at Hong Kong at about midnight and we get taken to the Peninsula Hotel. My bedroom was bigger than this room.

Benedetti: Hmm! That's a big room!

Browse: Big. It's a five-star hotel. And I had this room to myself and I was getting undressed--so tired--to have a bath. The bathroom was all marble and gold taps and the door knocks and in comes a servant with a huge tray of tea and cookies and a big fruit bowl and we had to get up at five in the morning because we're flying out. Well, Edith is desperately ill in the morning!

Benedetti: Oh, my goodness!

Browse: And we put her back on the plane to fly back to L.A.

Benedetti: Was she—did she have food poisoning or--?

Browse: Sick. Edith was always—she got sick a lot, you know. I think it was a nervous thing, but she was really ill, and so I was put in charge of the tour.

Benedetti: Oh my goodness! So how did that go? [Laughing]

Browse: It was unbelievable! We put her on the plane. We had to delay everything because we were supposed to go off--

Benedetti: Yes.

Browse: --at daybreak.

Benedetti: So everything had to be rescheduled.

Browse: Rescheduled. There was one person there who was in charge of everything, you know, and he took us round and then handed us to each of the cities we went [to] or towns we went to--to the folkloric person in that area. But I was in charge suddenly of all these rich ladies and this one guy, he and his wife were members and they were not of the same class. They were really fairly modest people, but this was being their dream trip.

Benedetti: Oh-h-h.

Browse: But all the rest were kind of Beverly Hills matrons. And I had to look after all these people for two weeks.

Benedetti: Had any of them been to India before?

Browse: No.

Benedetti: But that didn't make any difference in their attitude, huh? Browse: They were excited, but, I mean, the first place we went to was so primitive. **[1:00:00]** I mean *primitive* primitive. Nothing works. The showers don't work. The beds are not—you know, they're like one-star hotels. But the food was very good and so everybody kind of mucked in. But it was a very difficult trip and these ladies were so demanding. I used to have the itinerary and call them through and say, "I'm going to read this out, what we're doing tomorrow, and then I will repeat it, and then I don't want anybody to ask me any more questions because you make notes now and I'll see you tomorrow morning. And as soon as I finished the whole thing--and repeated it--then they: "What are we going to--?"

Benedetti: [laughing] How long was the trip, do you remember?

Browse: Nearly two weeks. We went all through India and up into Nepal.

Benedetti: Oh-h-h.

Browse: And everything was organized with crafts homes and storytellings and Indian dance and Indian music that went on and on and on and on. It was a nightmare!

Benedetti: Well, you had me up to the second "on and on"!

Browse: It was like a *nightmare*.

Benedetti: Oh my goodness. Well, what a shame! Because it sounds as if it could have been--

Browse: We went to one place where we all wanted to buy wonderful kind of embroidered quilts. And I thought, I would buy some stuff to cover my trip, because I suddenly realized I owed Frank all this money! Thousands of dollars! And I had to pay him with interest in a certain amount of time. How am I going to do it? So I thought, I could buy some things and sell them. So we all went through this wonderful quilt place and they throw out—like rugs—one quilt after another. And then one lady says, "I'll have that one!" "Well, I want one just like it!" But they're all one of a kind. "Well, similar to it!" And it went on and on and on. And eventually they made their purchases and I said to the man, "Now they're getting on the bus to go back to the hotel. Then when they get to the hotel, you tell them that they have supper tonight in the hotel and their bags must be down at 5 o'clock the next morning," and I jumped off the bus! And I went back and I did my buying.

Benedetti: Well good.

Browse: Oh, they were so furious: "We would have stayed."

Benedetti: [both laughing] Oh my goodness!

Browse: It was very, very—it was enlightening—but very difficult. I had never been a tour leader before these people. Very, very difficult people.

Benedetti: Even if they were different people, it would have been [difficult]--

Browse: I mean this whole thing [the responsibilities and difficulties during the trip that I was not expecting] came out when we came back and I sent my first check—I think I paid him over six months—to Frank, he never so much as said, "Thank you for doing this—and let's forget the interest," or something like that.

Benedetti: I'm really surprised at that.

Browse: I was shocked. And I think the interest rate was about ten or twelve percent in those days.

Benedetti: Lord! That's quite amazing. [Both laughing]

Browse: But the Indian show that we had—I think I was--was that Folk and Craft Museum? [It was one of the first CAFAM shows, mounted at the end of 1975.]

Benedetti: You know, I'm going to have to fill that in to the transcript--

Browse: That was very interesting. It was a very interesting show.

Benedetti: I sort of remember it, but I don't have a clear memory of it.

Browse: Very interesting.

Benedetti: You think that it may have come from another--

Browse: It came through some Indian tourist travel thing. But we saw—I mean we went to where the centers of folkloric activity were.

Benedetti: Well it sounds like it could have been fabulous.

Browse: But we did three or four of those [unintelligible]. I think they went to South America—somewhere?

Benedetti: Oh the Associates went to a lot of places.

Browse: Yes, uh-huh.

Benedetti: And--

Browse: I only did the one.

Benedetti: No, that was a major feature of the Associates group and I think--

Browse: I don't think it was fundraiser--

Benedetti: Well, I believe that some of the fee that you would pay went to the Craft and Folk Art Museum.

Browse: Yes, but probably not as much as should have done.

Benedetti: Right, probably. But that was a major attraction, and I was just talking to Tomi Kuwayama about that because she helped with some of those later tours, and she was saying that some very high-end people, including Anna Bing Arnold, were very enthusiastic members [of the Associates] in the early days of that. 1980, I guess, is when Judith Stark--was the person that got that started [with the help of Mark Gallon]. [1:05:00] Oh—and an interesting feature of the earlier ones--and this is in the archives too—is that Edith used to insist that—I guess they took turns writing a diary for each--

Browse: Oh really?

Benedetti: --you know, each person on the trip would be responsible for one day's diary—and then at the end they would put them all together.

Browse: Do you have that?

Benedetti: Yes, yes, yes—including pictures.

Browse: Oh my heavens.

Benedetti: So, you know, it was a fun thing.

Browse: Just like high school girls all getting together—or college.

Benedetti: There were some men that went on those—some husbands that went on those trips. But it was, yeah, it was a good group to keep those high-end people associated with the Museum. Some of them were board members, but not all.

Browse: But as you said, the board members really never did their jobs in finding the money and--

Benedetti: Well [sigh], they didn't have enough people on the board who could really afford it at the level that the Museum needed it.

I did want to ask you about the Folk Art Council Market because I thought maybe you or the Shop were involved in some way in some of those.

Browse: No, no, no, no.

Benedetti: Never at all.

Browse: I actually took part privately for my company.

Benedetti: Oh! You had a booth [for your import business].

Browse: For a couple of years running. No, that was done by a completely different group--

Benedetti: Well, I knew the Folk Art Council sponsored it and organized it, but I just thought maybe [the Shop was involved in some way]?

Browse: No, they did everything, you know. They sent out the invitations and manned the door and--

Benedetti: Yeah, Tomi was saying, you know, how proud they were of it. They were able to turn over at least ten thousand dollars to the Museum a lot of time.

Browse: The first few years it was kind of a—very exciting--

Benedetti: It turns out—I found out that the very first one was put on in Dorothea Casady's garden. Do you remember Dorothea Casady?

Browse: Dorothea Casady, yes.

Benedetti: And she had a big garden—I was there once.

Browse: Beautiful house, yes, yes.

Benedetti: So that was the very first one in 1983. And then in 1984--in the next year--they had it in the Annex, which seems like a peculiar place for it but I guess a lot of people were attracted to it. They must have had some banners or something, you know, down on the street that attracted people. Just for that one year it was in the Annex. That was in '84, and then the next year they started at the Veteran's Memorial Auditorium, and that's where it's been [ever since]. And I understand that it's not going to be anymore.

Browse: Anymore. You know the building next to [CAFAM]—what's it--

Benedetti: To the east or the west?

Browse: To the east. The beautiful big marble building that's there.

Benedetti: Well, you're talking about the building on the corner—5800—that we thought we were going to buy--

Browse: No, not that one.

Benedetti: Oh.

Browse: The next building. The huge big complex.

Benedetti: Oh, the—yes—I think it's called the [Wilshire] Courtyard or something like that?

Browse: Yes, it's beautiful.

Benedetti: Yes, it is. It has gardens and--

Browse: When I saw that going up, I said to Edith, "We should have a contemporary craft fair--like they have on the east coast--on the west coast—all in the Courtyard over a weekend.

Because the shops are closed [on the weekend]; parking is there.” And we would write to all these artists and we’d offer them spaces. Artists take their own equipment, you know, or you offer them a tented space. But the whole place. I walked through it so many times and thought, “It’s absolutely perfect for a craft fair.”

Benedetti: Yes, it would be.

Browse: And I brought it up many times and nobody seemed interested in it. And, you know, they have these fairs in the east coast and in the Midwest and places like that, but there wasn’t one--

Benedetti: They do have them around--

Browse: They have one in San Francisco, I mean the very big ACC [organized by ACE—American Craft Enterprises--the marketing arm of the American Craft Council] in Fort Mason.

Benedetti: Well sure. And I don’t think they have anything like that in Southern California. Well, occasionally there’s [one in] the Santa Monica [Civic Auditorium].

Browse: They did an ACC once in San Diego, I think. But I thought L.A. would be a perfect place and I thought CAFAM **[1:10:00]** would be the name and it would--

Benedetti: Well, I don’t suppose you volunteered to do that!

Browse: No, not me, but I--

Benedetti: That’s the key [laughing]!

Browse: But you know, among the things that I did [was] I went and did a course in art marketing [with] Cal Goodman here soon after I left the Craft and Folk Art Museum, and I did that and I actually registered a company to do a craft fair. [Cal knew and/or had addresses of all major crafts people.] There was a craft fair down at the—what’s the round place near USC? The Forum.

Benedetti: There’s the Forum, yes.

Browse: Used to be, there was a small craft fair that was run by a group--contemporary crafts and folk art, macramé and baskets--and we felt that there should be an important--this is pre-ACC--and I spent all my savings on doing an art marketing course with Cal Goodman [Goodman gave and still gives courses in art marketing] and we went as far as looking at sites, where to have it, downtown in old theaters and places like that--and then I contacted a whole lot of artists--famous artists, who would kind of--[I would say], “Would you come and take a booth in our,” you know, and no one--they would [agree to] come and set up their wares, but they wouldn’t pay for a booth. I mean, you pay thousands of

dollars for a booth today. We had to find out who would do toilets and who would do putting up the curtains in the booth--

Benedetti: Yeah.

Browse: I spent a whole year doing this—privately, you know.

Benedetti: Oh.

Browse: And it never worked out and Cal Goodman said, “You know, really, I’ve got all the names,” and we wrote to these and most of the artists thought they would take part, but they wouldn’t put down anything. They wouldn’t even put down five hundred dollars for a booth.

Benedetti: You were before your time.

Browse: Way ahead of my time.

Benedetti: Now there are tons of these fairs. They’re not super high-end.

Browse: This was to be high-end. This was just pre-ACC. I mean we spent so much time studying the whole concept of it. He [Cal Goodman] was really keen on doing it [as a silent partner, but offered nothing financially, only his ideas].

Benedetti: Well, how frustrating for you!

Browse: And, you know, with the kind of [unintelligible] background [I had]. I’d been with the Craft and Folk Art Museum. People kind of knew who I was, but it was way ahead of its time. And in a way, it seems sad that the Folk Art Council thing might die, but--

Benedetti: But I think the Folk Art Council [itself] is going to continue. I would assume so.

Browse: As a group.

Benedetti: As a group, but Tomi said last year was the 25th year [for the Market]—that’s a long time for any sort of institutional thing. And so maybe it’s time.

Browse: I always think there is a time sometimes, and people will look back and the old folks will pass on, and the young ones will say, “Oh, I think granny was involved in that . . .”
[laughing]

Benedetti: Well, I just wanted to talk a little bit about the time that you were beginning to decide to leave again in late '88 and early '89. All of us there—all the staff—were just consumed with the plans for this development that Wayne Ratkovich had--

Browse: The Tower thing.

Benedetti: Yes. The Tower thing. And we spent—the Museum spent a lot of money on hiring a woman—and I was involved in writing the proposal to hire this person to--

Browse: What was her name?

Benedetti: Well, the person who was hired eventually was Marcie Goodwin. She had helped with what they call the “building program” for the—for MOCA downtown—the Museum of Contemporary Art. And there were two other candidates and the staff had already put in a lot of time [in space planning]. I think you were one of them.

Browse: Oh yes, yes.

Benedetti: You came up with your—the Shop space needs—and I was sort of coordinating it just because nobody else seemed to [1:15:00]—I couldn’t get Patrick to even understand what a building program was. And of course, what we were trying to do was to avoid what had happened at LACMA. We even got some people--

Browse: --from LACMA--

Benedetti: --from LACMA. I don’t—maybe you were at that meeting--

Browse: I think so.

Benedetti: --where we sat down with them and they told us some of the horror stories of how their space turned out because the architects involved in that building had basically not paid attention to the staff needs at all. They had just built this, you know, beautiful building, and functionality had gone out the window. So that’s what the CAFAM staff was trying to do [--to avoid that situation]. And we were just totally absorbed in that. And then there was also worry because we were going to have to move out of the--

Browse: --the building--

Benedetti: --the original building—certainly if the development happened, we had to. As it turned out, the actual [immediate] impetus for us moving was because the City finally clamped down and said, you know, that brick building is going to crumble in an earthquake. You’ve got to--you know, it’s not safe.

Browse: No.

Benedetti: So they made us get out. And it’s a good thing, because then we had the earthquake in 1994--

Browse: I know, but the building didn’t fall down.

Benedetti: No because it had been--

Browse: --retrofitted. But so many of these buildings didn’t fall down.

Benedetti: That's true. It was, you know--

Browse: They never really proved that--

Benedetti: But in the library in 1994 we did have, you know, book shelves that weren't tied to the walls fell over and there were books that had to be picked up. [This was not in the original building; it was in the 5800 Wilshire building.] And I think maybe some objects in the Shop, I'm not sure about that. [The Shop hadn't yet reopened.] But, at any rate, we had to get out [in 1989]. And that [situation] was occupying us. And you, as well. And you were telling me yesterday, off the recorder, that that was--

Browse: Well I think—I don't remember what I said, but I think when we had those meetings and I was given the plans for the Shop, I was so distressed.

Benedetti: When you saw the architect's [Richard Weinstein's] drawings.

Browse: The architectural—I mean, for the Shop it didn't work at all. It [was] divided into three sections. There was a kind of central elevator that you came up into the building. You went into the building and then there was a little bit of a courtyard and then you came upstairs on an elevator or an escalator. And we were on the second floor—the Shop—and it was to be a Shop and a walkway and a gallery and three separate entities and I said, "How could we possibly man it?" Unless we had closed cases. I mean it was just impossible. And the big round--

Benedetti: You'd need a lot more staff to--

Browse: Oh, much more. And you had this beautiful round kind of tower, which was the gallery Shop, with all glass—three quarters glass walls overlooking the street and the tar pits. And I said, "But there's no walls to put anything on."

Benedetti: Or storage space.

Browse: Or storage. So that really distressed me, so they asked and I gave them what we needed [in terms of] space. And I think that was the part that kind of put me off the whole thing. And the idea [began to come to me] that I think I just want to get out of it.

Benedetti: Had the idea of moving to the May Co. come up at that time?

Browse: It was just kind of--

Benedetti: Starting—it was one of the things that were being considered.

Browse: Started—it was one of the things that I just [said to myself:] I don't want to be bothered with that. I couldn't see—I think I went down to the area [where the May Company was located at Fairfax and Wilshire]. The May Company was so tacky at that time--

downstairs, the entrance, the shop down there wasn't doing well. And we were—what was it—the second or the third floor?

Benedetti: The gallery was on the fourth floor [where the furniture department had been].

Browse: And kind of, when I got there I thought, "Oh no, no, I don't want to be involved." And I think that's what made me say no.

Benedetti: Well, I guess you were able to see that this was not going to--

Browse: No--

Benedetti: --be successful.

Browse: And it's a long-term thing. And I mean there's to be no restaurant. I mean, it was just to be a fourth floor bidding-time for a building that was unique. It was going to be the first multi-use--

Benedetti: Yes—that was exciting. Talk about being before its time!

Browse: Way ahead of its time! **[1:20:00]** I mean there was even—are they going to—they hadn't approved of the concept yet really, had they?

Benedetti: Well yes, they had gotten [through] the [City] approval [process].

Browse: The multi-use?

Benedetti: Yes. The sticking point was the financing—the developer's financing.

Browse: Looking back—have you got the plans?

Benedetti: Yes.

Browse: They're not good, are they?

Benedetti: Well, they're certainly not [exactly] what the staff wanted, you know. It was--

Browse: There was a theater I remember--

Benedetti: Well I don't know if the—was the theater in the final drawing? Of course, we never got to the stage of having . . . detailed [drawings]. The only drawings they ever did were really very simple--

Browse: --basic things?

Benedetti: --basic things.

Browse: I don't know—I think I saw something where--I'd been there too long, and the hey-day had gone, and somehow [sigh], I don't know, it was the right time [for me] to leave.

Benedetti: Now, when you left, were you still going—you were still running your business.

Browse: Yes, uh-huh.

Benedetti: So you were not really retiring--

Browse: No.

Benedetti: --at that point. But they did give you a party. You want to tell us about that?

Browse: They gave me a party. They gave me a party, yes. Edith said, "We'll have to have a farewell party." You were there?

Benedetti: No. I don't know, I think I must have been out of town or something.

Browse: I don't know how many people were at the party--

Benedetti: Or maybe it was just the Shop people that were invited.

Browse: There weren't that many, but it was [at] the Regency [Club], very fancy. And instead of having one or two tables, they had a big square table with a well in the middle, so we sat around four sides of this big open place, so the only person you could speak to was a person on each side of you or, if you were near the corner, you could shout across—but the rest of the party--

Benedetti: That's always a problem with a big sit-down dinner, yeah.

Browse: It was ridiculous. And then, as I say—I think I mentioned—I expected my farewell present to be this computer. I'd talked about it so long—I mean it was new—computers--

Benedetti: Yes.

Browse: They didn't have laptops; they had [PCs—personal] computers.

Benedetti: Yes.

Browse: And I kept saying, "When I get my computer—my farewell present. . . ." I kept talking about it. [Both laughing] And nobody listened!

Benedetti: Oh-h-h!

Browse: And then they gave me this farewell Timex watch, which is so awful! [Both laughing]

Benedetti: Oh my God. Do you still have it?

Browse: I think I have it and I felt, you know, if it had been a gold watch—. [But] I didn't need anything, you know, the memories were there, and they sent me off with a very nice party, and everyone had good wishes. It was, you know, it wasn't like the end of the world. But [sigh], for me it was. And, you know, afterwards I wasn't—what do you call it?—my life membership was not renewed and--.

Benedetti: Now how soon after that did that happen?

Browse: Well when they moved back into the store [at 5814 Wilshire], after the May Company—how long was it [the Shop] away?

Benedetti: Well, it was—they were in the May Company for over two—almost three years, I think-

Browse: Yes, well not much was really happening [during that time].

Benedetti: Well, they didn't—and there was a little Shop there in the May Company as well as the one that, you know, Michelle and Carol ran at 5800. But once they—we left the May Company, there was a period of—gee--I think it was almost three years, again, where we had very little public presence. There was, of course, no restaurant. But there was also no Shop *at all* during that time—not until they reopened in 1995--

Browse: Really?

Benedetti: --was there any Shop at all. Yeah, there was nobody—you know, that woman Sally Shishmanian--

Browse: Oh yes, yes. Oh, terrible, yes.

Benedetti: --was the interim Shop [manager] in the May Company, and also, you know—Michelle and Carol [who had been running the Shop when we moved to the May Company]—Carol got pregnant and Michelle went to work in the library and so Sally Shishmanian was hired to take over as manager at that corner building [at 5800 Wilshire] for, I don't know, a year or so. But once everybody left the May Company—the May Company closed and they [the CAFAM staff] moved into the 5800 building, we were extremely busy. We were so busy getting ready for the new—I had this huge project in the library—it was going to be a fellowship program. I had gotten a lot of money from the Irvine Foundation [1:25:00] and we were planning and did put on two fabulous workshops for museum workers on the topic of "Diversity and Inclusion." And it was very successful. There were something like 18 [actually 22] teams of people from that many different museums in Southern California.

Browse: And where did you do all that?

Benedetti: Well, the woman who ran it, or at least [organized] it, Nancy Downes-LeGuin--she had been at LACMA and she applied for this job because I knew I couldn't personally do all of this and run the library. She found an interesting place almost downtown. It was run by a Catholic organization--

Browse: Good heavens!

Benedetti: And it was just a big room—and they had catering available, you know, you'd--

Browse: Good heavens, really!

Benedetti: But the good thing about it, besides the space, was that it was so centrally located. It was just west of downtown, so—and we had people coming from the Autry Museum and from the Getty and from—even from up in Santa Barbara.

Browse: Wow!

Benedetti: So—that was what I was involved with and everybody seemed to have some special project. Marcie had the “Language of Objects” project, which she was working on--

Browse: Oh, yes, yes.

Benedetti: -- [it] ended up as an exhibition at the Smithsonian!

Browse: Hm-hmn.

Benedetti: --which was extremely prestigious, but it didn't do much for us in L.A.! [Laughing] You know. It looked great on the--you know--story of the Museum. But we were really—had kind of disappeared as far as the L.A. population was concerned, until we reopened [in 1995]. And it was a wonderful reopening. Did you come?

Browse: What was the first show?

Benedetti: Well, there were several. There was the huge Warmbold Mexican folk art collection. That was in the 5814 building [the original, but renovated, building] on the top floor. He was the fellow who was the editor of the San Antonio paper who died of AIDS. And he had this enormous collection, which Mrs. Warmbold gave to the Museum.

Browse: I'm sure I came, yes.

Benedetti: And in the 5800 [Wilshire] gallery was this—basically a history of the Museum.

Browse: Yes, I remember that.

Benedetti: That had, you know, that door--

Browse: Yes, um-hmn. I remember that the show, um-hmn. It was quite exciting. Of course, you know, that building was offered to Frank [Wyle back in the seventies].

Benedetti: Oh--yes, go ahead.

Browse: Edith took me upstairs and, you know, they even had people there to see if they could add another floor on. Architecturally, they said it was sound. Oh, that was just such a terrible one of Frank's catastrophes!

Benedetti: Yes! I have in the archives the memo that Edith sent out to the membership in '75—it was right around the start of the Museum—and the building was available for around \$300,000 [the amount is variously quoted as between \$300,000 and \$360,000]. It's my understanding that in the end [in 1996 or 1997] Frank or the board offered the owner . . .

It was [something] like \$200,000 short of what the owner wanted [the asking price was \$2.3 million] and he [the owner, Joseph Ventress] just refused—so the whole thing kind of collapsed because with the . . . new parking lot being attached to that corner building [and the old parking lot between the two buildings having been turned into a courtyard]--

Browse: --the whole thing, yes.

Benedetti: --we had no parking suddenly. And--

Browse: It was extraordinary wasn't it?

Benedetti: And all the offices were in that building, as well as the library.

Browse: It's ridiculous, isn't it?

Benedetti: Ah, yes, it was a series of [sigh]--

Browse: It was a catastrophe really.

Benedetti: Yes.

Browse: It shouldn't have happened!

Benedetti: It happened slowly, over a period of time, and it really wasn't until--

Browse: It's such an ugly building now.

Benedetti: Oh yes. [1:30:00] It was never a beautiful building.

Browse: No, no.

Benedetti: But it had good--

Browse: It had space.

Benedetti: --space inside.

Browse: And apparently it was structurally sound [so] that you could have added up.

Benedetti: I--that would have been even [more] terrific.

Browse: Another floor, um-hmm.

Benedetti: And it did have an elevator.

Browse: No.

Benedetti: It *did* have an elevator.

Browse: Oh it did, yes it did, and I remember Edith standing up there with me [looking around].

Benedetti: That was one idea that she had that should have been followed at the time.

Browse: Hm-hmm.

Benedetti: But of course, you know, hindsight is always--

Browse: Well, what can you do?

Benedetti: Yeah. Well, John, is there anything else that you [would like to talk about]?

Browse: Nothing! Other than it's just been fun remembering some of this. In fact, it's such a long time ago, and you think it's—it seems longer than--

Benedetti: And yet the memories are still very vivid.

Browse: Oh the memories--they come back because it was such a very good time. I think everybody who worked there, no matter what the ups and downs, were dedicated to the—not only to the folk art [and] contemporary craft, but, you know, The Egg and The Eye [restaurant], the Museum. There was a kind of excitement about it.

Benedetti: There was and I think—I don't know about you—but I think that there were a number of young women—and that certainly includes me—that had ambitions and we saw this good idea and we really wanted to push forward, not only for the Museum, but because we had some personal ambition. And I think that Edith recognized that we were going to work especially hard for not very much money [laughing] because, you know, it meant so much to us personally.

Browse: And you don't get that dedication anymore with people, because it's too much for too little, you know?

Benedetti: I think that they do have some good people working there right now. I have met with all of them and--

Browse: Really?

Benedetti: Yes, I've showed all of them—yes—I brought Maryna, the director, over to LACMA to show her the [CAFAM] library. And then I brought all of the rest of the staff—I think there's only five of them, but—[laughing].

Browse: I've never met her but there are people who like her and there are some who don't like her.

Benedetti: Well, she's tough. She's—but I think she's certainly doing a heck of a lot better than the three or four directors that they had between Patrick and her.

Browse: But do you see any kind of long term--

Benedetti: I have no idea.

Browse: --future?

Benedetti: I think that, as always, it's a financial problem. And you talked about that yesterday.

Browse: Um-hmn. And you know, when you think of—which I always thought was the strongest thing that we should have preserved—was the education department. When you think of the lack of art education today in the schools--

Benedetti: Well they're doing a lot [at the current CAFAM]. They have an educator and she is very busy--

Browse: Yes, but I mean, generally, in L.A. it's so bad.

Benedetti: Oh, well it's, you know, there's no public financing for it anymore.

Browse: Whereas the Craft and Folk Art Museum could have been such an anchor or inspiration for it.

Benedetti: Yes, it's—but they—I think they're doing the very best that they--

Browse: --they can.

Benedetti: And--

Browse: Is Frank still on the board?

Benedetti: He's still Chairman of the board.

Browse: Chairman--

Benedetti: So, I hope to speak to him--

Browse: And Patrick's no longer--

Benedetti: He's no longer associated with the Museum, no.

Browse: When did you see him last?

Benedetti: I—a few years ago.

Browse: I think the last time I saw him was at your farewell—

Benedetti: Oh-h-h--my retirement [party]--

Browse: --with his bombshell of a wife—the lady he married.

Benedetti: Oh yes--

Browse: She was very blonde and very young and . . . I don't remember [her name].

Benedetti: I don't remember either [Phyllis Ginter], but I am planning to talk to Patrick and to Frank. So--well, I guess we'll— [wind up now].

Browse: Well, it was fun. Thank you.

Benedetti: Thank you so much, John. It was great to hear your stories over such a long period of time.

Browse: It was a good time.

Benedetti: It was. Thank you.

End of Session 2 [1:34:44].